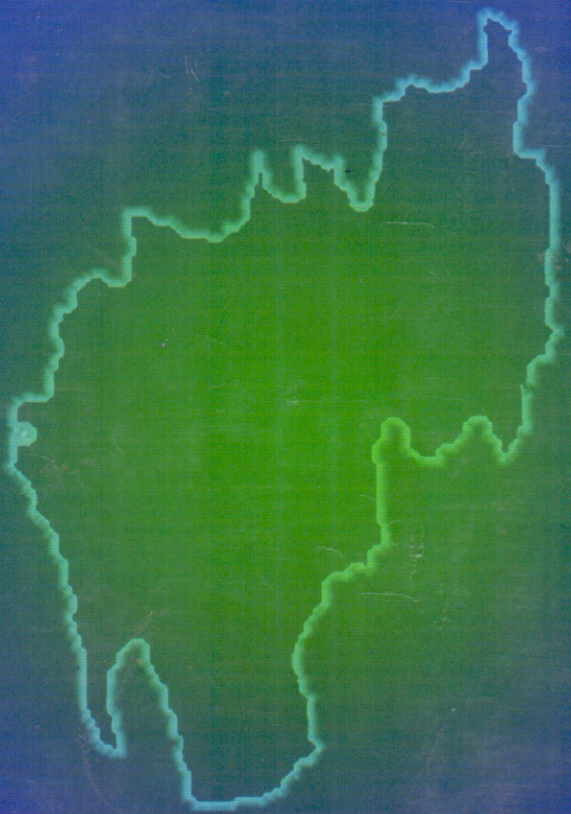
Folk - Tales of Tripura

Dr. Jagadis Gan-Chaudhuri



Tribal Research & Cultural Institute,
Government of Tripura

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Dr. Jagadis Gan-Chaudhuri

Tribal Research & Cultural Institute,
Government of Tripura
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Folk-tales of Tripura

Written by : **Dr. Jagadis Gan-Chaudhuri**

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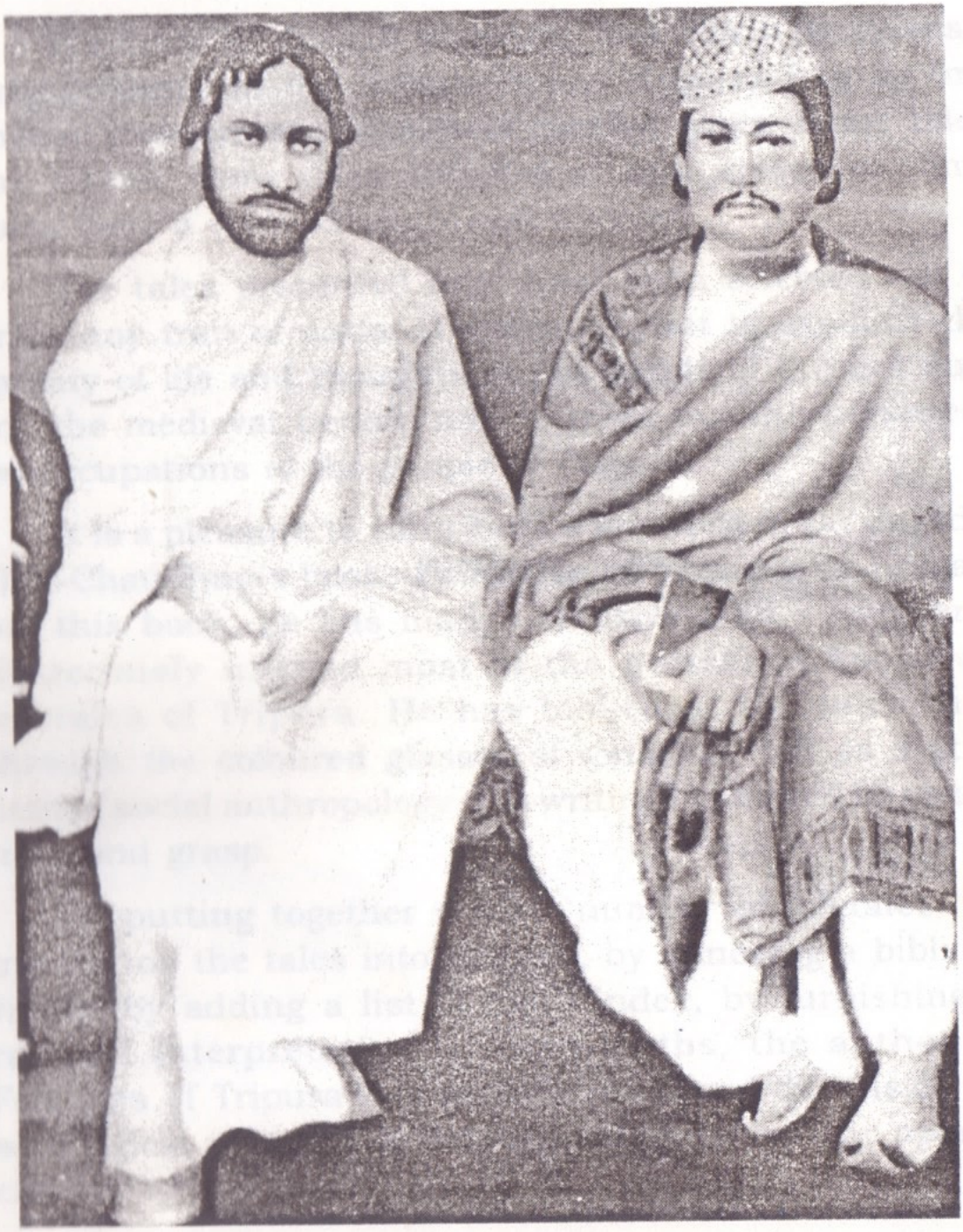

Dedicated to the memory of

***Maharaj* RadhaKisor Manikya**

Foreword

Formerly an ancient kingdom, and now a north-easterly province of the Indian Union, Tripura has an immense treasure of folktales of varying types. Some tales are myths; some tales are packed with episodes; some tales have a voice of truth and warning.

The tales presented here have been selected not to trace any trait of national character, but to examine the quality of life and thoughts of the people of Tripura during the medieval period, and to point out the persistent preoccupations of the people of Tripura.

It is a pleasure to contribute a foreword to Dr. Jagadis Gan-Chaudhuri's book, ***Folktales of Tripura.*** In preparing this book, he has made extensive field survey and dexterously utilized most of the published books on folktales of Tripura. He has looked at the tales, not through the coloured glasses of romance, but as a student of social anthropology. His writing is marked by clearness and grasp.

By putting together a large number of folktales, by translating the tales into English, by annexing a bibliography, by adding a list of motif index, by furnishing a rational interpretation to some myths, the author of Folktales of Tripura has added a standard dimension to sociological research in Tripura. He deserves our appreciation.

(SAILOHNUNA)
Director
Tribal Research &
Cultural Institute
Government of Tripura.

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PREFACE

In *Folk-tales of Tripura* one hundred thirty-two folk-tales of north-eastern India have been incorporated. The folk-tales of the days of animistic belief and subsistence agriculture with its concomitant tears & smiles, fill the pages of this book. These folk-tales, varied in contents & theme, have a rural flavour.

These stories tell us much of what Tripura was like in the medieval period. These stories indicate that our literary edifice might have its beginning in the myths & folk-tales; it has grown up from the old animistic simplicity & fantasy to modern humanistic complexity & realism. These stories show that our medieval ancestors were like ourselves, loving as we love, hating as we hate, cheating as we cheat, and that society is a scene of interplay of good & evil forces. These stories reflect the spirit of the age : supernatural view of the world. These stories are beautiful in expression, & lasting in ideas.

To the readers living outside Bharat, Tripura is an obscure land, *terra incognita;* to the readers living outside Tripura, Tripura is merely a name; to the readers living inside Tripura, all the stories are hardly known. Now, they may be interested to see most of the tales collected, compiled, edited & translated in one volume. Some readers may find in these tales a deep sympathy with the flora & fauna of Tripura; with the hills & rivers of Tripura; with the rites & rituals of Tripura. They may be wise to find in these tales an element of heritage of Tripura. These stories provide a vocabulary which may be at the disposal of some research scholars.

Every care has been taken to render the original version into clear & simple English. Every caution has been taken not to misinterpret any legend, and not to dramatize or romanticize them to a ridiculous degree. However, certain chaotic notions which are likely to confuse the readers have been avoided. Translations, however faithful, cannot give a just impression of the original versions heard from the mouths of the bards, story-tellers, village elders, grand-parents and priests. This attempt does not pretend to be a complete account of the study of Tripura folk-tales.

In undertaking this work, my main concern was with the conditions of life and the quality of thinking of the people of Tripura during the medieval period. Behind every story there is a social environment. The factors influencing the medieval thought-patterns have been briefly explained.

Several years of research and writing went into the preparation of this book. It is perhaps the first attempt to make the folk-tales of Tripura the subject of anthropological analysis. By attempting to maintain a balance between romantic narration and rigorous analysis, *Folk-tales of Tripura* may be a contribution to the study of the history and culture of the people of Tripura. It may be a literary pabulum, and a field of research.

An appreciation of cultural diversity, a belief in psychic similarity of mankind, a cross-cultural comparison, a devotion to understanding archaic popular thought in its traditional setting, a loyalty to the norms of anthropological research may be discerned here.

Sri Panchami J.G.C.

4.2.2014

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It is my duty as well as pleasure to put on record my indebtedness. I have drawn on the labour of multitude of story-tellers, collectors & predecessors. The notes & references throughout the book and a bibliography only partly indicate my indebtedness.

Long ago those who contributed their time, money energy and knowledge for the collection of folk-lore of the north-eastern part of Bharat deserve appreciation. The names of some of them are : C.V. Furer Haimendorf, E.Gait, Gurdon, T.C. Hodson, W.W. Hunter (1840-1900), J.H. Hutton, R.H.S. Hutchinson, T.H. Lewin, A.Mackenzie, J.P.Mills, L.S.S. O'malley, N.E. Parry, H.H. Risley, Sandy, J.Shakespeare, C.A. Soppitt, E. Stack, C.Stewart, L.A. Waddel, J.E. Webster, Dalton, Dunbar & Verrier Elwin (1902-1964).

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I got an opportunity of attending the classes of *Gurudeva* Professor Sudhirranjan Das (1916-1996) and

his fascinating presentation of anthropological topics, and of working directly under his effective supervision during the early 1970s.

During the course (1968-1988) of field survey, a large number of Tripuri, Jamatia, Riang, Noatia, Kuki, Lushai, Halam, Garo, Khasia, Magh, Chakma, Uchai families generously provided me not only various information about folk-life and folk-lore, but also offered me food and shelter. My indebtedness to them is deep. *Maharajkumar* Sasadhar Bikramkisor, the ex-Director of Tripura State Tribal Cultural Research Institute, gladly gave me a number of books by way of gift and encouragement. Sri Narayan Ch. Debnath of T.G.B. offered me food & shelter at Gandachara in 1983.

Sri Narayan G. Baitule, Sri Mangesh S. Joshi of Nagpur have inspiringly allowed to use the rich library of HDSM, Dhantoli, Nagpur. The ICCS also has allowed to use its library. Usually speaking confidently, with an emphasis upon some meaningful words, Sri Muralidhar K. Kawadkar has occasionally moderated this work. Sri Nagesh Khare and Srimati Rajani Khare have been sympathetic enough to present some useful books from America. Dr. Ujjwala Chakradeo, an able, efficient and highly placed lady of Dhantoli, Nagpur, promptly arranged the collection of Dr. Verrier Elwin's book : *Myths of the North-East Frontier of India* for my use. A few learned persons, namely Ila Bandopadhyaya, Dipoj Chattopadhaya, Prabhatkumar Thakur, Basudev Pal & P. L. Gogia have kindly patronized by lending some valuable books for my use.

Mrs Manjiri Joshi, while typing, listened with endless patience, as I pointed out many mistakes. But for any omission & commission, I alone am responsible. I beg pardon.

TSTCRI has kindly taken pains to publish it. Sri Sukanta Pal and Sri Samar Sen took care to illustrate the book. Sri B.K. Dhar has coordinated the work.

J.G.C.

Tripuri Folk-Tales

1. Lârimâ

Fog is generally seen everywhere in Tripura and in other parts of the north-eastern region of Bharat during the autumn, the dewy and the winter season. The density of fog in this region becomes maximum during December & January only. Over the bushy dingles in the eastern hilly part of Tripura thick fog looks like huge smoke.

What is this fog? Is it fog or something else? The hill people of Tripura, watching the vast cloud of smoke, have got an answer to this question. According to the traditional interpretation, it is not fog: it is smoke, rising from the fire-place of Lârima. Lârimâ is a benevolent, kindhearted, pious woman. She lives in an invisible hut in the deep hills. Only a dead person can see the hut. For her benevolence she is blessed with a boon to have an immortal life. From time immemorial she has been cooking rice & vegetables, and providing the last food to the dead persons. There is a jungle track leading to her hermitage. The dead persons are to walk through the track. There is a bulky log of wood placed across the track. This is called *Bufang Kebeng*. The dead person must cross the log; once the dead person crosses the log, he forgets all the memories of life. Next, the dead person comes to take rest in the hermitage of Lârimâ. The mother welcomes the dead person, offers seat & water and the last food, and gently bids farewell for ever.

2. Pilgrimage of Soul

There is a taboo on killing certain insects like butterfly, grass-hopper, wasp, etc. particularly at night. The Tripuri, the Riang, the Jamatia, the Noatia, the Uchai, the Halam, the Lushai, the Garo, the Bachal people observe this taboo with a religious devotion. why? Here is an explanation:

The soul is called *Falâ*. The soul of a sleeper is believed to wander away from his body to visit the places, to meet the persons and to perform the acts of which he dreams. The soul takes the form of an insect like butterfly, bee, black-bee, fly, grass-hopper or wasp.

Now, the absence of the soul in sleep has its dangers. If the soul is disturbed, detained away, or destroyed, the concerning person will die. So to disturb, detain, harm, hurt or kill the insect would be fatal to the sleeper. It would be equally fatal to waken a sleeper, because the person's soul was away and might not have time to come back. The sleeper must not be disturbed in any way & at any time.

3. The Sky

Long, long ago the sky was far below, very near the earth, over the human head. It was, as if, a large, wide canopy. It was like a very big bread, soft, sweet and edible. The Tripuri people used to cut pieces of the sky for food. They would relish it.

Mortar and pestle have been quite ancient artifacts for husking paddy and pulses, etc. In the hills of north-eastern corner of Bharat almost every family possesses a pair of mortar and pestle. These instruments are made of a particular type of wood, preferably *shawl*, or *segun*, or *sundi*, or *gamair*. The pestle is a long stick, about six feet. The mortar approximately looks like a barrel-shaped drum, with a slim middle, and a hollow at the top. The mortar looks like a cylinder.

One day one Tripuri woman was husking paddy. She was pounding dry paddy at the open courtyard. She was deeply engrossed in the work. Standing beside the mortar and putting a quantity of dry paddy in the cavity of the mortar, she had to repeatedly strike the paddy with the pestle held vertically. Suddenly and unintentionally, the pestle struck against the sky. Immediately the sky went high above.

A Galaxy of myths

The two Indian epics, the *Râmâyana*, and the *Mahâbhârata*, have proved themselves to be perennial sources of inspiration and an ocean of wisdom from which a galaxy of folk-tales, myths, poems, songs, dances, dialogues and visual arts have been composed by the people. While explaining certain characteristic features of animal and plant life, the local folk culture of Tripura refers to the corresponding episodes of the two epics. Here are a few examples:

4. Râm-Kalâ

In the hills & forest of Tripura, a kind of wild banana plant is abundantly available. It is called *Râm-Kalâ*. Why? During the period of exile, Râma, Lakshmana and Sita cultivated this plant: they used to eat the banana, and used its leaves as plates.

5. Sita-begun

In the river valleys of Tripura, a kind of wild brinjal is available. It is called *Sita-begun*. Why? During the period of exile, Rama, Lakshmana & Sita cultivated this plant; they used to eat the brinjal.

6. Sitâ-Kachu

In the river valleys of Tripura, a kind of wild arum is available. Its leaf is tinted red. It is called *Sitâ-kachu*. Why? While Ravan had been abducting Sita from the forest, Sita's vermillion fell on the leaf of the arum. So the leaf has red spots.

7. Pituli Pata

Immediately after the abduction of Sita by Ravana, the helpless wife cited a number of animals, birds, plants as witness. Rama & Lakshmana anxiously went out in search of the lady:

A leafy plant was one such witness. It is known as *Pituli Pata*. The Tripuri people call it *Lairuk*. Its scientific name is *Phrynium imbricatum*. Its leaf trembles even at the slight blast of wind. Why? Rama & Lakshaman asked the plant: Have you seen Sita? The plant was afraid of

the wrath of Ravana; so, the plant suppressed the news by shaking its head negatively. So, it was cursed. This is why the plant goes on shaking its leaf (or head) almost continuously.

8. Kingfisher

The Kingfisher birds are called *Mâchrângâ*. These birds constantly flutter & flicker for few minutes about twenty feet above water, espy the prey and suddenly dive into water and catch with mandibles those small fishes which roam just below the surface of water. This is a remarkable technique and a successful adventure. Why? Rama asked: Have you seen Sita? The bird was brave enough to give correct evidence to Rama & Lakshamana. So, Rama blessed the bird. This is why the bird can catch fish in such an adventurous way.

9. Swans

In a lake there was a pair of swan; they were husband & wife. They saw Sita during her impediment. The wife sought permission of her husband to report the incident to Rama. Being afraid of Ravana, the husband discouraged & advised his wife in a low voice to refrain from telling the truth. Thus, the male swan incurred the displeasure of Rama. This is why a male swan's voice is hursh & rough; while a female swan has a melodious voice.

10. The Black-faced Hanuman

Hanuman desperately crossed the sea in search of Sita. There he met Sita in the *Asok Kanan* and ate dainty fruits of the garden. The gardeners took great trouble to take him to the court of Ravana. At Ravana's order, rags were tied to his tail and fire was set to it. Hanuman jumped up to commit arson and disaster. Thus burning down a major portion of Lanka, Hanuman dipped into the ocean and returned. At that time, the scorching heat of the fire blackened his face. To get rid of the shame, Hanuman sought the boon of Sita. By the boon, faces of the entire species became black.

11. Rhesus Monkey

The pelvic region of Rhesus monkey is remarkably reddish. Why? While constructing a long bridge or causeway from Ramesvaram to Lanka, the monkeys were joyously carrying boulders, stone, etc. Rama was chewing betel-leaf. Then suddenly a few drops of red spittle of betel leaf fell on a monkey's body, particularly on his rectum. This is why pelvic region & rectum of monkey look reddish.

12. Palm squirrel

The Indian palm squirrels have their fur remarkably striped. Why the squirrel is stripy? At the time of construction of a causeway between Ramesvaram and Lanka, even the tiny squirrels participated: They were not strong enough to carry heavy stones; so they used to wallow on the sea-shore to collect sand on their body and roll their body on the causeway to make it smooth with sand & clay. Rama was glad to take one of them in his hand with affection and patted & caressed gently with fingers from head to tail. This is why the Indian squirrels have stripes on their fur. The Aztecs of Mexico have a similar story : a tiny bird tried to extinguish a big fire.

13. Chhengthum-phâ and Nâithakbi

Chhengthum-pha had been the prince of Tripura.

Long ago, one day Chhengthuma-pha was out on a hunting expedition. The young prince had sportsmanship. He was accompanied by his retinue. He enjoyed the excitement of the adventure. In those days most of the kings of Tripura used to hunt much in their youth.

During those days, the greater part of Tripura was scantily peopled, and many persons were crippled and numerous domestic animals & birds were killed by the wild beasts. The traditional weapons of the inhabitants were bows & arrows, traps, snares, knives, sticks, etc.

The assistants of the prince erected a *mâchân* in a

tree, out of the reach of the animals. There the prince and the assistants ambushed silently and comfortably. They were whispering and expecting the passage of a beast. Meanwhile, a boar came out dashingly and gruntingly. The prince shot at the boar; the beast was not mortally wounded. The wounded beast charged immediately and then hurried away rashly. The prince and his companions climbed down to go after the boar. It took some time.

Now, a group of Tripuri girls were collecting wild vegetables and leaves at a distance in the same forest. They were used to do many domestic chores, besides helping in the fields. Among the group of girls, a girl named Naithakbi had some qualities of head & heart. Suddenly, she saw a wild boar rushing towards them gruntingly. Naithakbi had bow & arrow in her basket; she at once shot at the animal. The beast was struck down.

The beast fell squalling & yelling. The prince along with the attendants & beaters & *sepoys* reached the spot, and became astonished to see the animal struck down. The prince appreciated the skill of the unknown hunter and looked around. A flock of black, jungle-crows soared about overhead; the noisy birds were cawing & screaming, clinging to the swaying ends of the branches of the tall trees. The prince saw a group of cheerful girls at a distance, and sent the senior *Hâjâri* to ask if any one of them had hunted the beast. The prince took rest in the shade of a big tree.

The arrival of the prince's men in the lonely forest had its impact; it produced mixed reaction in the minds of the lasses. The lasses were whispering to each other. Punângti became apprehensive; Malakti became afraid; Karamti too became perplexed. But, Naithakbi stood confidently, observing the squad's behaviour and assuring her own companions. The self-contained girl had about her an air of positive personality that made her in every

way a contrast to her companions.

Meanwhile the senior *Hâjâri* came near to the lasses and narrated: My dear girls! you look at the bright young man taking rest in the shade of the big tree; he is our dear prince; he had shot at this boar; the boar was not struck down. The boar escaped. Do you know who later struck down the beast?

The senior *Hâjâri*'s words were hardly out of his mouth, when Naithakbi said: Yes Sir! I did it. Is he displeased with me? Have I committed a crime?

The senior *Hâjâri* replied: No, No! The prince has appreciated the skill and wanted to know your whereabouts.

Nâithakbi said: My name is Nâithakbi. My father's name is Chadrai *Senapati*; my father was a soldier, rather the commander in the military service of the kings of Tripura. After his retirement, the king granted him lands. Now, he is an old man. The village he lives in is known after his name.

The senior *Hâjâri* again said: I am certainly glad to know your identity: you are the daughter of one of our most distinguished soldiers! His courage and the prowess of his company contributed to the strength of the kingdom. Nâithakbi said: Thank you for your kind words.

The senior *Hâjâri* conveyed the information to the prince. The prince too became cheerful and eloquent and spoke a lot in appreciation. Like father, like daughter! Matured & deepened by her father's wartime experience, she spent many of her playtime hours in drilling & shooting. She is second to none. She was a great pet, for her parents had no other son or daughter. The senior *Hâjâri* humorously added: She is fit to be a queen. All the attendants leered, and looked at each other. The atmosphere became light and jolly.

The two groups stood apart. The lively, high-spirited prince had a magnetic personality; while the lovely and intelligent lass had something unique in her character.

So nothing hindered the swift budding of one of the great romantic affairs of Tripura. In each group there had been associates who were watching the manners of the two. Meanwhile, an idea flashed out in the mind of Nâithakbi: the prince might have taken objection for killing the wounded beast: so she asked her associates not to be afraid but to carry the beast in order to offer it to the prince. They at once lifted it and placed before the prince and bowed humbly as a mark of respect & offering.

The prince was captivated by this proof of Nâithakbi's bold wit. It occurred to him that he did not know the pretty girl before. He chuckled and asked: have you killed the boar?

Nâithakbi : Yes, *Mahârâj*, I have!

The Prince: Since you have killed, you could have taken it!

Nâithakbi : *Mahârâj!* but you wanted to kill it. I have committed a mistake. Kindly excuse me; and accept it as an humble offer.

The prince gladly agreed to accept the offer. Nâithakbi said a few words in an easy, cordial way and left the place along with her associates for collecting vegetables. The prince & his associates watched them as they sauntered off. It refreshed them all.

The greater the adventure, the cheerful was the prince. So he hit on a romantic plan. He directed a few associates to go ahead toward the village of Châdrai *Senapati* and if necessary to do a little of chopping & lopping. Next, a few *sepoys* were to follow & carry the boar, and to start the preparation of a small feast in the house of the *Senâpâti*. The prince wanted to relish the meat jointly. On receiving the information, the *Senapâti* became very glad & grateful and supplied all necessary materials for the feast. While the cooking was going on, the prince along with the senior *Hâjâri* and a few others, reached the village. The *Senâpati* & his wife went together to a distance to welcome the prince. The honourable

guests were offered water for washing. The prince's hands & feet were washed by the hosts. Giving a seat to the prince, the host duly showed homage to the very important person. The *Senapati* felt a warm surge of nostalgia, and a sudden uplift of the spirit. By now, the *Senapati* became an old man with grey hair. Here was a man who fought many battles.

He recollected the memories of many events :- several battles, the journey to distant hills, the odds faced, the calamities encountered, the victories own, the paternal love & affection of the old *Mahârâjâ*, the team-spirit of his colleagues, etc. The *Senâpati* talked endless of his happy days with the *Mahârâjâ*. Tears of joy were streaming down his face. The old *Senâpati* remembered everything and everyone very well.

The prince came with a heart overflowing with love. He longed for an opportunity to praise Nâithakbi. A scope came along with a reference to the boar. The prince spoke a lot with delight and wonder. The prince appreciated the *Senâpati* for imparting training to Naithakbi in martial arts. The prince was smitten by the charms of Naithakbi, then a girl of about sixteen.

The senior *Hâjâri* was supervising the work of cooking, while the *Binandiâs* laboured with the utmost ardour to complete the cooking in time. Meanwhile, Naithakbi came back home with fresh vegetables. She carried the wild vegetables & leaves in a bamboo-basket (= *Lângâ*) suspended from the forehead over the back with a piece of bark of the *Udâl* tree (*Sterculia vilosa*). Nâithakbi was intoxicated with the delight, but her expression for the moment was little elusive. She went to the kitchen room to look after the preparation of food. On seeing the cooking process satisfactory, she said a few words in gratitude. She herself prepared *Godak*, a kind of salad famous in Tripura.

The *Senâpati* invited the village elders, while Naithakbi invited the young boys & girls. The village was

fluttering with excitement. The villagers joyously assembed, and bowed to the prince in obeisance. For about an hour the house was full. The elders and the prince were entertained with a sweet drink (= *butuk*). After giving drinking water, Naithakbi retreated to kitchen, leaving the men. The village elders fell honoured; they were eager to know the news of the palace. The *Senâpati* wanted to know about the health of the *Mahârâjâ*. The prince said: when my father had been in the prime of name & fame, my mother suddenly died. It was a terrible shock! my father has lost all interest in life.

The village elders consoled, and the old *Senâpati* recollected the reminiscences and gratefully expressed that his fame & fortune were owing to the kindness of the old king. Nevertheless, the village elders and the friends of Naithakbi retired for the time being.

By the time, the food was ready. The hosts honourably requested the guests to kindly sit. They set themselves down to dinner, free from anxiety; but hunger & adventure made a very cheerful and hearty repast. The prince relished *Godak*, & *thâkchâng* (= a kind of wild potato), and appreciated the skill of the cook. The hosts were enchanted when the prince expressed enthusiastic admiration for Naithakbi. The *Senapati* added : I have myself taught Naithakbi & her friends the art of archery; and her mother taught the art of cooking and the art of weaving. And the parents taught the art of economy, the art of addition & preservation, for, otherwise even the royal treasury becomes empty, as a bottomless basket is incapable of holding fish, or as oil leaks out of the container through a small hole.

So, by birth & training Nâithakbi was intelligent & industrious, courageous & cautious; she was not muddleheaded; the gift for delicate flattery was absent in her nature; she disliked hypocrisy. She was straightforward. She was healthy, wealthy & wise.

The senior *Hâjâri*, the junior *Hajari*, the *Binandias*, after the dinner, were offered bedding for rest. Out of fatique, they fell asleep soundly.

The prince was separately provided with decent bedding. The prince was tossing this side and that side. Meanwhile, Nâithakbi appeared with betel-leaf and tobacco. The tobacco was prepared in a bamboo pipe. The prince was passionately expecting this courtesy from her. The prince smiled & winked her to sit for a while. Nâithakbi sat with her eyes downcast. The aristocracy, the fine physique, the adventurous spirit & the youthful mirth of the prince already created a havoc in the heart of Nâithakbi; a profound emotion filled her whole being; she had never before felt such an excitement. But she kept her emotions under control; she remained silent. She squinted with a positive expression on her face suited to the occasion and with a desire to hear.

The prince began to speak. His eyes became tender. He spoke with an affectionate tone and with a lovely smile. The prince made himself at home and spoke: Naithakbi! from the very first sight, I have been convinced about your sterling qualities; you are unique; it seems that there is no other girl like you in this kingdom; your qualities will make you queen; you are fit to be a queen. Now tell me about your life.

Nâithakbi spoke briefly about her parents, friends, fields, village elders & the countryside. The prince loved everything that belonged to Nâithakbi, everything Naithakbi did, he loved her dress & ornaments, her parents & friends, her *Godak* & *butuk*. Thus they went on talking about themselves. But Nâithakbi thought inwardly: if the prince proposes to marry, what should I do? if the prince winks his *sepoys* to abduct me, what should I do ? Where the kings & nobles have such records, the ordinary subjects are helpless & vulnerable! I am not one to elope secretly; I am not to disturb my parents & friends. I am not one to be tempted by the young prince

so easily & quickly. Naithakbi had thus a second thought in her mind. She was not prepared for such a serious situation. She was rather in an awkward position. Wishing to avoid all ornaments & consent, she decided to verify.

The prince said: Nâithakbi! with a lady like you, a young man is sure to be perfectly happy on earth. I am passionate to love you with all my heart & soul. I like to marry you!

Immediately, Nâithakbi stood up and departed without any delay. She met her mother sobbingly. The mother stretched out her arms, and the daughter nestled by her side. The mother asked: what is the matter? The daughter smiled shyly.

In the afternoon the prince seated himself comfortably. The senior *Hâjâri* and the junior *Hajari* came near to the prince and bowed to him in obeisance. Then they were silent. The *Senâpati*'s younger brother Chadârai too came and bowed to him in obeisance. The prince asked: Dear *Senâpati* ! what is the matter with your villagers? Are they learning the martial arts?

The *Senapati* replied: *Yubarâj Mahârâj*! all the able-bodied villagers have already learned the martial art. Even the girls have become experts in archery. My daughter, Naithakbi, has been imparting them.

The prince said: I am very glad to learn that even the girls have been imparted lesson in archery, & in wrestling. It has been possible because of the interest & initiative of Naithakbi. I want my obedient & peace-loving subjects to be trained up thus. This kingdom suffered a lot from raids and headhunting committed particularly by some people of the eastern hills. The *Senapati* added: My daughter was eager enough; her earnestness was an extraordinary incentive to me to impart training. Moreover, in view of the recurring raids from the eastern hills people and the impending danger from the enemy aliens, we must train ourselves. It takes time to come aid & assistance from the distant capital.

The prince said: Exactly so; I agree with you. For the same reason, I am inspiring my subjects to learn the martial arts. We are surrounded by some provocative neighbours. We must maintain our national independence.

Listening to the inspiring words of the prince, the old *Senapati's* consciousness awakened sharply and poignantly. His arms, his hands, his feet pulsated & throbbed warmly; old memories passed before his mental vision. He said: *Yubarâj Mahârâj*! I too want this. We have fought many battles. We have never been defeated. Some belligerent neighbours had attacked us a number of times! Some hills people resorted to raids as an easy means of procuring food & tools, etc. The kings of Tripura too took some steps to check them.

The prince concluded: Because of your suffering & sacrifices, our country remains independent. We feel proud of our country. We are grateful to you all! We should remain alert in view of the impending crisis.

The senior *Hâjâri* was obliging & submissive; he made a submission: *Yubarâj Mahârâj*! several days had flown since our departure from the capital. It is not safe to stay in the hills for a long time; in the hills & jungles mosquitoes, black-flies, gnats, snakes render life troublesome. The old *Maharaja* out of paternal affection & loneliness, may be worried. The *Gariâ Pujâ* festival is nearing shortly. So we should return as early as possible.

The prince replied: *Hâjâri,* you are quite right. So, call in the *Binandiâs* for homeward journey's preparation. The *Senâpati* intervened eagerly thus: *Dharmâvatar*! if you leave so quickly, we all will be disappointed and depressed. We have the rare opportunity of getting you amongst us. Your arrival has animated us all. You have come from far-off capital; we shall feel sad if you do not stay here for a few days more. The old *Mahârâjâ* will rest assured. So you are to accede to my humble request.

The Senior *Hâjâri* fell ashamed and with folded hands

said: You have no cause for worry. You have made us all feel at home here. We are getting all comforts. I am worried about the loneliness and anxiety of the old *Mahârâjâ*. Moreover, during the ensuing *Gariâ Pujâ* the absence of the prince from the capital will make the festival dull.

The prince was demurring and listening to the conversation between the retired *Senâpati* and the acting senior *Hâjâri*. Now, the prince expressed his considered opinion on the situation. It seemed to him that he had just reached the acme of happiness. Not being able to make up his mind to leave the home of Nâithakbi, the prince delayed his homeward journey and suggested to the senior *Hajari* that the senior *Hajari* should take the *Binandias* with him on the trip towards the capital. No objection could be raised to a proposal so reasonable, and it was settled that the senior *Hajari* & the *Binandias* (=sepoys) should start early next day for the capital, while the prince & the junior *Hâjâri* would halt for a few days more.

The senior *Hâjâri* and the *Binandias* turned steps homeward the next morning with provisions of food supplied by the *Senapati's* family. The senior *Hâjâri*, on reaching the capital, kept the old *Maharaja* informed of all happenings. It took days to narrate the episodes one after another. Words flowed elegantly from the senior *Hajari's* lips at the time of narrating the skill of Naithakbi in hunting. He did not forget to mention the delight of the prince, the gratitude of the old *Senapati*, the training of the youths in martial arts and the like. It was a pleasure to the old *Maharaja* to recall scenes that had remained in his memory. The old *Maharaja* being very pleased, assured to reward the two *Hajaris*.

At very early dawn a crimson tinge was yet to glow in the east. Naithakbi & her mother woke up and prepared *Âoâng bângui* (= a sweet cake of rice wrapped up in leaf) for the prince and the junior *Hajari*. The guests were still asleep.

At daybreak, in the morning, the young girls were all on the alert, and eager to set out and to display their martial art. Born & brought up in the hills of Tripurâ, they were accustomed to brave the beasts, the heavy rain, the cold and the raids. Accustomed to hunting, fishing, collecting, farming & living in the outhouses of their farm, they were not afraid of animals and of headhunters.

The *Senâpati* imparted them additional practical knowledge of the things of life which could never be acquired from books. The wise *Senâpati's* guidance made the boys & girls useful citizens and fearless feudal soldiers. The girls assembled at a lonely place down their farm. They were armed with bow & arrow, club, sword, cudgel, stick and long knife. Naithakbi was in command; she was serious & sincere.

The prince and the junior *Hâjâri* enjoyed the delicious cakes in the morning, and got ready to see the archery, wrestling and other arts. Accompanied by the *Senapati* & the other village elders, the prince & the junior *Hajari* reached the ground. The players made a befitting welcome. The order and the arrangement were perfect. The players displayed their arts. The prince was highly delighted. He praised them. The players came back home; the prince and the junior *Hâjâri* strolled about the fields & valleys for about an hour. The sylvan environment was vibrant with the melodious notes of various birds.

The *Senâpati's* younger brother, Chadarai, had a daughter named Punângti. So Nâithakbi and Punângti were cousin sisters. Punangti also was equally handsome, but not nearly so courageous as Naithakbi was. At Naithakbi's suggestion & guidance, Punangti gladly agreed to take care of the junior *Hâjâri*. The two sisters did everything in silençe, and spoke but little even to one another; one would wink and the other would understood.

Day after day passed. Time went on. The prince and

the junior *Hâjâri* were enjoying the hospitality of the villagers. They had round them all the comforts of countryside. Free from the bustle of life in the capital, they enjoyed the charm of sylvan life. They dwelt there in joy. They doubly felt the attraction of the open-air existence. The prince fell in love at first sight. The junior *Hâjâri* fell in love with Punangti little by little. There was a bachelors' dormitory (= *Chhiklâ Michip nok*) in the village. The prince and the junior *Hâjâri* would often pour forth their stores of experiences before the listeners.

So, time went by; the popular *Gariâ Pujâ* was ensuing. The prince had remained there till the time of the *Gariâ Pujâ* came. The preparatory work was put in hand enthusiastically. Every family was brewing wine. In the *Senapati's* village, the householders felt quite a thrill of satisfaction because of the presence of the two special guests. The young boys & girls had their hearts leaped with exultation.

The time flew. The holding of the *Gariâ Pujâ* annually & usually starts from the *Visuba Sankranti*. The consecrated day fell today. The previous night was spent in high spirit and tension. Many guests & neighbours assembled. The holiday came very brightly, and the villagers could not walk without singing, smiling and merry-making. At dawn all the villagers & guests bathed in the stream & springs, and put on new dress & ornaments. A very beautiful throne was prepared with bamboo, cane & flower for the prince. The bachelors' dormitory was elegantly decorated for the installation of the prince. The *Senapati*, and the village elders duly escorted the prince to the dormitory; and placed him in the throne. All the villagers solemnly bowed to him in obeisance. The prince addressed the audience with a very inspiring speech. The junior *Hâjâri* thanked the villagers for their hospitality, courtesy, and loyalty. The *Senapati's* brother stood up on behalf of the villagers and thanked the guests. After that, the *Senâpati* offered a

quantity of sweet wine to the prince. The house was full of visitors; everybody had to wait till the prince sipped. With his kind permission, the visitors next started sipping. The villagers there drank & smoke as the other villagers did in their respective homes & villages.

The young prince was not accustomed to drinking wine; he felt uneasy and dizzy; a drowsiness came over him; he could not sit; he became rather unsteady on his feet. The junior *Hâjâri* quickly came forward and tripped the prince out of the hall into the house of the *Senâpati* for rest. The prince put his hand on the *Hajari's* shoulder. The prince lay asleep, while the junior *Hâjâri* sat down below, and began brooding over the way of expressing his personal affair. The prince awoke after about an hour. The junior *Hâjâri* measured his language and with due respect sought the prince's permission to make a prayer. The quick-witted prince looked at the junior *Hâjâri* smilingly and permitted. Taking advantage of the good humour of the prince, the junior *Hâjâri* hinted at his weakness or liking for Poonângti. The prince shrugged his shoulders gladly and agreed to negotiate.

The prince called in the *Senapati* and his younger brother after a while. The two brothers came & paid homage and sat down. The prince began speaking : Dear *Senapati* ! since we have been here, we have had nothing but praise for you. You have always been obliging, loyal and hospitable. You have been found very careful to make our stay comfortable. Now, I cherish to strengthen the happy memory of this camp.

The two brothers nodded and sought suggestion from the prince himself. The prince smiled and said: You know that the junior *Hâjâri* is very dear to me. He is quite young, energetic, loyal and prompt. And here I have found Punângti very charming, & hardworking. What would have become if they are matched together? What do you say?

The two brothers became very glad. To get such a bright bridegroom was a matter of prestige. The two

brothers looked to each other: for a few moments they could not utter a word. The *Senapati* replied: *Yubaraj Maharaj!* well, it seems to us that it depends entirely on you. What is your proposal is order to us. Can we deny it? It has added to our pleasure and prestige. It will go a long way in the legend of the *Gariâ Pujâ*.

The two brothers came back to the hall and announced the news of the proposal. All the visitors had been eagerly waiting and they now accepted it with applause. The suggestion seemed to them all well worthy of adoption, and they immediately set to work to carry it out. The betrothal was solemnized on that very holiday amidst amusements & drinking.

After a few days, the prince said to the junior *Hâjâri*: We have seen the games & sports in which the girls displayed their excellent skill. Now, I like to see the skill of the boys. You communicate my desire to the boys for displaying their skill tomorrow morning.

Accordingly, the junior *Hâjâri* informed Punangti's brother Chhâklom. Chhaklom informed all the boys. The jubilant boys informed all the villagers. The next day, the boys were found on the alert and almost all the villagers intended to accompany the prince. The players assembled at a low gorge which lay below a field of shifting cultivation. The spot was suitable for such games & sports. The prince, the *Senapati* and the elders sat in the watch-house (= *Gâireng*) of the field.

The boys displayed their skill in archery, swordsmanship, javelin-throwing, wrestling, etc. Chhâklom displayed a remarkable degree of dexterity. So, he was selected group-leader by the prince. To render these sports and amusements useful, the prince reminded the boys & the girls of the recurrent dangers in which they would be required to volunteer feudal service. The prince wished to develop their natural energy. The prince suggested to add a few items like climbing, leaping, racing, lifting, etc. The prince reminded

that Tripura had a tradition of teaching the coward soldiers a lesson by sending them handloom for weaving. Weaving being a job of the ladies, was a punishment, a disgrace to the soldiers. The prince concluded with an earnest appeal to the young boys & girls to display their valour in times of national crisis. The young boys & girls assured.

There was enough of adventure and romance. Now the time came for homeward journey. The next day one *sepoy* came with an urgent message from the capital. The king of Ârâkân had already arrayed a big army against Tripura. The old king of Tripura was profoundly troubled. The prince must come back without delay. The prince then & there informed the *Senâpati* & the junior *Hâjâri* to carry into execution the plan of homeward journey.

The newly found happiness was fated to be brief. The halcyon days could not last long. The prince had to pay his attention to an administrative business of the highest importance. The parting moment was very touchy & melancholic. All the villagers came out of their houses and assembled to bid farewell to the prince. The prince's playful fancy and the sterling spirit of adventure served to fan the passion of the villagers.

The prince whispered to the *Senâpati* : the preliminary ritual of marriage between Punangti and the junior *Hâjâri* has been performed; postpone the marriage; the junior *Hâjâri* will come after sometime to complete the marriage ceremony; but about the marriage of your daughter, Naithakbi, please do not do anything without informing me. Whatever deeper scheme, unknown to others, might have been in his mind, the prince assured the old *Senâpati* that the prince himself would select the bridegroom. His eyes looked into her eyes for a moment!

Having said his goodbyes, the prince started to leave. The prince and the junior *Hâjâri* galloped and looked back. The path went winding up & down the hills, in & out of

the jungles. The villagers watched the trail of dust and gazed steadily & intently to the furthest end till the last sight of the prince.

Punangti had a hope, a dream; she was bethrothed; the prince himself stood as a go-between. But what about Naithakbi, whose love for the prince was far deeper than the combined love of all the villagers? She felt all dream & memories vaguely, with disillusion. There was, as if, nothing to do for to-day, for to-morrow, or forever! She sat down gloomily upon a piece of wood with head downcast hiding her face in her hands!

Upon reaching the capital, the prince took rest for a while. Immediately the old king called in the prince. The prince bowed to the king and briefly narrated his experience of the journey, and the king was very glad to know the episode of sincere hospitality offered by the old *Senâpati.* The king calmly inquired about the health of the faithful *Senapati*, & made a comment: He was a tower of strength to the army. The prince added: Now, he is a good neighbour to everybody. The prince did not go back over the details of his adventure.

The king then came to the main topic of discussion, and said : I am old enough; I cannot look after the growing volume of administrative business. You are my dear son and the future ruler. I like to bequeath the kingdom to you in near future. Anyway, at this moment your first task is to overcome a crisis brewing from Arakan in the south. The king of Arakan out of assertiveness has arrayed army in the Tripura-Arakan borders. We have come to know the news of the coming storm of attack & plunder. We are to face the crisis. This is no easy task.

The king called in the chief minister and the chief of the army, and set them to discuss about the matter with the prince. The aged king retired to rest delegating them all authority. They decided to send an expedition of five thousand soldiers under the leadership of the prince. And a few subsequent batches would be kept ready.

Now, under the existing feudal system the king was the *Bubâgrâ* (= the real owner of all lands of the kingdom). The peasants had right as well as duty. In times of crisis the peasant had to leave his paddy field for the battle field. To inform the peasants there were two types of signals in Tripura: *oâthlang*, and *Furâi*. The two signals used to differ in minor detail. There was no qualitative difference. The *Furâi* had a little higher dignity to be sent by the king only. Here in the present case the prince, the chief minister and the chief of the army took the decision; So they arranged to send several messengers with *oâthlang* in hand. Because the professional army of Tripura had been skeletal, the feudal force would be occasionally & temporarily raised. So battle or counter-attack was a concern of almost every family of Tripura. The misfortunes & horror of such attacks used to lie heavily upon the peasants also. The loss of men, money & materials would be enormous.

Now, the stir & turmoil touched the peasants of Tripura. A messenger reached the village of the old *Senâpati*. A trail of wailing & weeping followed. Things went badly at many homes. But in obedience to the summon, all able-bodied young men must participate as front-line fighters.

Naithakbi, with a thrilling sensation, went on inspiring the young boys. Had she been a boy, she would definitely participate & fight valiantly and return home victoriously & joyously. However, it was no less important to inspire the young men, to animate them with a sense of patriotism: A psychological war ever remains a part of the material war. The time was very short, and she moved from door to door, and with her leadership quality, she raised a village protection force, mainly consisting of the girls (= *chhiklî*). She tried in every way to make the boys ready. Nobody else in the hamlet did so much.

In the morning of the appointed day of departure, the young fighters (= *Chhengkrâk*) assembled in the house

of their leader, Chhâklum. Chhâklum had his newly married wife at home. The villagers in a body escorted the fighters upto a distance. The heart of the newly married wife grew more & more heavy with a sense of anxiety. She was panting & sobbing. She sat down heavily. While wailing, she recollected her memories thus:

we have been married the other day
we have had a short time to stay.
The holy altar stands even to-day
This sacred symbol is yet to decay.
The bambooes used for pandal decoration
even now give our gardens protection.
The nuptial perfume served like a magic spell
and still gives us pleasant smell.

Alas! the royal messenger from the distant town.
Summons for a noble cause, to strike the enemy down.
As you are going to fight far away
Our lives are destined to decay.
My dear, how shall I check my agony?
With you all I like to accompany.
I shall cook & nurse, you are to fight
And verily crush the enemy's might.

Tears surged in the heart of Chhâklum also. But checking his emotion, he tried to divert her attention thus:

we are gallantly marching westward
For defending our motherland forward.
Holding a dress-stand, you may be lost in thought
Dry the wet clothes, the battle will be bravely fought.
Holding a bamboo of the bedroom, you may be lost in thought
Arrange the bedding, to the aggressors a lesson will be taught.
Holding a bamboo of the fire-place scaffold, you may weep the whole night
Preserve the pots, the raiders will be routed outright.

Do not worry about me so anxiously
I shall be coming back definitely.

All the villagers stood there barefoot. They all stopped talking and looked at them and listened to their conversation earnestly. Tears rolled slowly down her cheeks; she wiped her eyes on her clothe and again made an appeal thus :

Oh dear!
Your elder brother is in royal administration
From him seek a wise instruction.
It will be a strategy good
To sacrifice a he-goat from the wood
And before the god lie prostrate on sand
With donations in both the hands.

With youthful pride, Chhâklum replied:
Oh dear!
For motherland, we shall do or die
Do not tether me to your lovely tie.

With those words Chhâklum & his colleagues quickly marched ahead & went away. The young wife sat down heavily, and then lay on the ground with face downwards. Nâithakbi raised her and persuaded her to come back home. But she would not, sobbing bitterly. The neighbours brought her back into the cottage and laid her on the bed and lulled. She glanced at them pensively. She had been married the previous dewy season only.

The king of Tripura had already received an information about the advancing troops of Arakan against Tripura. So the king of Tripura undertook an expedition on a grand scale. The prince himself led the expedition. He had with him about five thousand troops, and arms and necessary resources. The two forces met on Tripura & Arakan borders. Both sides made the air ring with their defeaning shouts. The prince, mingling in the thick of the fight, encouraged the troops. The Tripura troops

displayed great feats of gallantry, the cloud of arrows rendered the opponents incapable of continuing the battle. Stunned by the fury of the blow, the aggressors left the field. The attack was repulsed. A huge quantity of booty was captured. The prince strictly prohibited plundering, ravage & other crimes.

The Tripura troops had enthusiasm. They were brimming with excitement. In spite of the victory, the prince liked to force his way forward desparately in order to teach the aggressors a lesson. For a decision, all sat together and the prince sought their opinion as to what they should do? They all, with one accord, said that the expedition should continue. Accordingly, the messenger was immediately sent to the capital for additional contingent. Devoting his time to princely duties, the prince lived there along with the troops & the subjects awaiting the arrival of the contingent.

Emboldened by the fresh arrival, the prince & his troops marched ahead & crossed the border. The troops unilaterally made the air ring with their defeaning shouts. While marching, they were whistling, & singing joyously. The childlike but firm agility manifested itself frequently among the young volunteers. The prince directed his spy to keep a watch on the movement of the troops of Arakan.

The king of Arakan saw the enemy swarming down from the hills & mountains of Tripura, like the red ants and the locusts, over-running Arakan; every moment the situation was turning from bad to worse. The king convened an urgent meeting. He strode in silence from one corner of his room to the other; the ministers insisted on a negotiation. The king consented and sent his ambassador.

The eloquent ambassador praised the prince a lot and said that the king of Arakan was desirous of negotiation, and extended the prince a due welcome. The prince of Tripura and the king of Arakan held a

conversation. The prince entertained the proposal of negotiation and pointed out the advantages of peaceful coexistence. The king of Arakan arranged to entertain the troops of Tripura with feast and offered the prince valuable gifts. Well aware of the importance of demonstration of strength along with moderation, the prince thus brought about peace in that border.

The prince, along with the troops decided to turn their steps northward & homeward on the next morning. They departed early to cover a long journey. The prince held in one hand a baton of *Khâllâi* bamboo, so thick, that it might well be termed a club. The troops, having accomplished their mission, were returning & travelling at a rapid rate with pride and nostalgia. They were cheerful in spite of some minor setback. They were talking, whistling and gesticulating.

Upon reaching the capital, the prince and the troops found the atmosphere rosy, charming and hospitable. The successful expedition overnight became the talk of the capital. The episode in the career of every volunteer was singled out as a striking illustration of their patriotism. They were entertained with feast and gifts. Pot after pot of country liquor were consumed. The volunteers retired and returned with many gifts. Thus the atmosphere soon came down to normalcy. Chhâklum came back home happily.

But fate was lying in wait for the prince. His life soón became far from comfortable. The condition of the health of the old king deteriorated almost abruptly. The excitement calmed down sharply. The ministers were worried. The friends became gloomy. The prince was brooding. All the physicians and quacks were engaged. The king had earlier indicated the name of the prince to be the successor. Now on his death-bed having repeated the same will, the king breathed his last. The subjects filed past to pay him a last homage.

The ministers and the relatives of the royal family

publicly announced the news of the demise of the old king, and also the name of the next king. With the permission of the new king, the funeral rite was duly and solemnly performed. Thousands of guests and subjects were entertained with a feast, gifts & donations.

For sometime past, the new king had a very busy schedule to attend to, like hunting, defending the kingdom, looking after the ailing old king, performing the funeral rites, etc. Amid such distractions, an untoward accident put the new king in an embarrassing situation.

The old *Senapati's* village again drew attention, however, in a different way. When in time Punangti found that she was to become the mother of an illegitimate baby, she became afraid. She kept her mother informed. It was a deviation from the social norms. The protective parents, evidently touched by the shameful conduct of the junior *Hâjâri*, were emotionally disturbed, and restricted the movement of Punangti. In course of time, she gave birth to a baby. The news went to the public ears. The public reacted to the deviation with disgust. It added to the loss of status and prestige of the family.

The parents, in consultation with the old *Senâpati*, sent a responsible messenger to the new king. Upon hearing the news, the new king assured the representative and sent him to the guest house. The new king dealt with matter with a sense of humour and imagination, and called the junior *Hâjâri* in for a private discussion and recalled, *inter alia*, the eposide of the betrothal. The intelligent *Hâjâri* apprehended something wrong, and admitted his crime. He was no longer in a position to strut to that village with dignity. The new king assured to arrange the marriage ceremony in the capital as early as possible. Next, the new king summoned the representative and through him invited the old *Senapati's* brother to the capital. Upon the arrival of the brother, the matter was settled and the marriage was to be subsequently solemnised to the satisfaction of all concerned.

The auspicious date of marriage was marked by ceremonies, rituals & merry-making. From the old *Senâpati*'s village the bridal party set out on foot very early in the morning. Punangti was the heroine of the day. Her parents, elders, friends & relatives accompanied her. Naithakbi too went along with them. The flute-players led the procession. As the bridal party marched, the young boys & girls indulged in cheerful & licentious singing & whistling. On reaching the capital, every member of the bridal party got hearty welcome, comfortable accommodation and palatable dishes. After a while, the subsequent rituals started, and the moment came to wrest the bride from her mother's embrace and bear her to her husband's care. After two days, the bridal party had to retire and to turn their steps homeward.

There was an air of romantic majesty in the palace. The bridal party became cheerful and pleased to see it. However, the new king had to remain almost beyond the reach of the bridal party. The legal complications surrounding the kingship forced him to maintain a distance. The life-pattern of a king was largely governed by laws to which the villagers were not accustomed. The king had, through his ministers & the senior *Hâjâri*, made arrangements for the care & comfort of the bridal party. The king particularly instructed the senior *Hâjâri* to look after the comfort of Niathakbi & her parents. Sick for a sight of the young king, Naithakbi yearned for the ceremony with the intention of looking at the king. But alas! The king instinctively knew that it would be a silliness to be so easily available, to allow her passion an outlet at that time and to indulge in frolic. He loved her so much that he did not mind suffering. He expected similar suffering from her. So, Niathakbi along with her parents returned with a heavyheart. The young king outwardly remained cold; he did not talk to the family of Naithakbi & the old *Senâpati*. Their mind became stern & suspicious. Paradoxical? The princely behaviour and

the kingly behaviour stood in sharp contrast. The prince was exceptionally changed since Naithakbi had seen him last. The present behaviour contradicted his previous words!

During the inauspicious period of the first year following the demise of the old king, all auspicious rituals were suspended in the royal family. Immediately after the ending of that period, the annual *Srâddha* ceremony was solemnly performed. The officiating priests were given donation in cash & kind, and many relatives and friends were entertained with feast.

Presently the time came for the ministers to arrange the ceremonial coronation of the new king. The priests consulted their holy books & almanac, and tentatively fixed an auspicious date during the bright fortnight. The ministers and the senior *Hâjâri* racked their brains for chalking out an elaborate programme. They met frequently and finalised the plan and sought the king's consent. At last a magnificent ceremony was successfully performed and the young king was duly installed in c. 1225 A.D. Now he came to be known as *Maharaj* Chhengthoom-pha (e. 1225-1250 A.D).

With his ministers & associates, the *Mahârâjâ* devoted himself to work. He used to spend all his days in affairs of the kingdom. He had immense capacity to work. He played an active part in administrative affairs and in the welfare of the subjects.

Now the *Mahâmantri* considered it a high time to arrange the marriage of the young king; and he was seeking an opportunity to elicit the royal consent. He was able with ease to draw the *Mahârâjâ* into a discussion of personal nature.One day the king was in a cheerful mood; that day though they began discussion about administrative affairs, the conversation slowly turned to family affairs. The minister's smiling politeness advanced the conversation. The minister said: Since the death of the *Mahârâni*, the old *Mahârâjâ* felt the strain of

hardships acutely. We used to sit down at a little distance for hours together, repeating his favorite anecdotes. Now, with the demise of the old *Mahârâjâ*, the palace seems to be lonely and forlornly; otherwise every thing in the palace is abundant, and the servants are dutiful & loyal.

The young king listened silently and looked at him gloomily. Presently as a king his step was to be cautious and his words measured. His opinion was of great consequence to others. He remarked: Is there any family without disease & death?

After a moment's pause, the minister said : This is a natural law; we are to adjust with it.

The king asked : How? The king tightened his lips. The minister answered : The palace now looks like dry desert, lifeless! We are like helpless orphans. The only way out is to bring *Rajalakshmi*. We earnestly feel the necessity of bringing *Rajalakshmi* as early as possible. If you kindly give your consent, we shall try seriously. Through our police and spy and other information network over the whole kingdom, we shall search out very pretty and lovely girls, and select the best of the lot.

The minister now observed a glad look of tacit approval on the king's bright face. Impressed by the earnestness of the minister, the king thought for a moment and then gave his consent and approved the plan with a modification. The search should not be a secret one through spy; there should not be any hide-&-seek game. It should be a public one through the cabinet and the police. Physical beauty should not be the criterion; sanity of mind, efficiency and courage, etc. should be taken into consideration. Beauty without virtue is a lump of flesh.

The king added a plan to test those qualities: let there be a drum-beating through the police to draw the attention of the *Chhikli* (= virgin girls) for participating in a weaving contest with the explicit purpose of selecting a suitable bride for the king.

Having outlined the plan, the king concluded with an allusion to the case of Nâithakbi. The minister flushed at the mention of the name of Naithakbi by the king himself. Both agreed to consider her case at the end. The young king's prudence about the dignity & duty of a queen convinced the aged minister.

Next, within about a fortnight the police arraged drum-beating in every village & market for the royal proclamation urging the adolescent virgin girls to weave unique breast-clothe of very, very fine texture to the effect that a shifting play of reflected sunlight on the clothe should shine forth & gleam like the colourful wings of a grasshopper, in partial requirement for eligibility of marriage with the young king.

This communication alarmed & enthused the people. All sorts of humour & rumour were aflaot. A craze for weaving was observed. The romance of being the queen of the royal dynasty caught the imagination of the adolescent girls. As usual, the news reached the village of the old *Senâpati*. It saddened Naithakbi and her parents. It was shocking to them. It meant that Naithakbi too should take up the work to prove her eligibility again. It was next to impossible; only with divine blessing one could do the miracle. Formerly, she did her best to restraint impulses & emotions, though she had basked in the sunshine of the princely favour. Anyway, the neighbours were now talking of the royal proclamation. It sounded very odd to Naithakbi; she turned away, and tears of vexation came into her eyes. She retreated and went inside to meet her mother & burst into tears on her shoulder. The mother consoled the daughter. The old *Senâpati* came & sat quietly. For sometime they sat remorsefully without speaking. Their eyes conveyed a grave dissatisfaction.

The proclamation brought shocking & startling news to the family. It was a disconcerting discovery, so discomfortable that for a few days they hardly spoke with

their neighbours, and for many days they deliberately avoided the paths in which the king's police were likely to be seen. They never thought of such a proclamation.

Sitting in the back porch & sick with anxiety, the parents one day raised certain questions to console the daughter:

Was not the prince's gesture of marriage a humbug?
Henceforth who will trust such a king?
Is it humanly possible to weave such a clothe?
What will he do, if the girls fail in the contest?

After a few days, the dawn and sunrise came with a tempting invitation to set out for a venture. Naithakbi decided to go to the field of cultivation. Knowing fully well her mental agony, her friends had already become hesitant to go, to converse with her. She too liked to avoid them. So she went alone that day. With her basket suspended at the back, she walked a distance and collected vegetables, and then reached a spot where the archery had been practised & displayed. She walked on a few steps and then stopped: it was the spot from which the prince had observed the display. She could not go ahead; she sat in the shade of a tree. Tears rolled down from her eyes. Those happy memories now seemed to be dreadful. She recollected her first encounter with the prince while hunting down a wild animal; she remembered the pleasant hours that she and her friends spent in presence of the prince, and she recalled to memory his interest in all that concerned her. Emotionally surcharged, she burst into weeping and made an earnest appeal to *Hâichukmâ*, the goddess of forest:

Oh, goddess! you are the guardian of animals & birds; you have immense capacity; you have divine power; kindly be pleased enough to grant me a boon, a blessing. You know that I have no capacity to weave a superfine clothe as a condition for marriage with the king. Oh, goddess! guide me; show me a way out; salvage me; protect me; otherwise, I will commit here suicide by hanging.

She knelt and prayed. She was very tired, tormented and heavy-eyed for want of rest and sleep. The time was about noon, and the temperature was hot. She lay unconscious. Her obsession was soon reflected in a daydream:

From a myterious place of the forest there came voice of assurance & advice. The goddess consolingly said: Nâithakbi! I am pleased with you. I have full support & sympathy for you. Your good days are coming. Be confident. Do not get nervous. From the nearby clumb of bambooes, cut a *oâmlâng* bamboo; cut it to size, leaving the root portion and the top portion, & prepare heddle, shuttle, sword, rod, etc. The instrument of the handloom must be made smooth, polished, soft, even, elegant, glassy & glossy. The sword for compressing the weft should be made very soft & smooth. Cotton & colour should be of the best quality. The peeling, ginning, carding, rubbing should be solemnly done with devotion & dedication. As long as you remain engrossed in the long process of weaving, you should remain silent & recluded inside your cottage. You should concentrate your mind on the work, remaining in solitude & alone. There should be no fun & buss. You may talk to your parents only. Never disclose or display it to anybody else. In case of any difficulty, do not hesitate to come here alone just at noon and to solicit my aid & adivice. Upon completion of the work, you must worship *Khulumâ* (= the goddess of cotton) and *Haichukmâ* (= the goddess of forest).

Next day, she was found deeply absorbed in preparing the instruments of weaving: She alone cut, pared off the surface, shaved off, scraped, rubbed off and smoothed the pieces & thus gave proper shape to each tool. She dexterously and rapidly did all those processes within one day.

Her next concern was to collect cotton. Early in the following morning she optimistically set out with a basket & a knife, and collected a sufficient quantity of clean &

ripe cotton from the garden. While coming back, she gathered certain useful plants, barks & leaves for colouring the yarn.

Obviously presently came a positive change in the attitude & activity of Naithakbi. She was not one to grope in the dark; she was not one to stroll along the narrow lanes of childish favour; she was not one to surrender to the princely whims; she was one to compete and to win the prize.

The veteran *Senâpati*'s keen eyes observed the change. He discussed the matter with his wife. With parental affection, they asked, and the daughter replied affirmatively. The parents again asked: what can we do for you? She replied: please bless. Do not disclose the information of my effort. Reserve a room for me and leave me there alone. Supply me food from time to time. Let our house be not a place for gossiping, drinking and hobnobbing for sometime. Let it be treated like a temple temporarily. The parents gladly agreed and acted accordingly. They made an apartment near the back porch.

Very early in the morning of an auspicious day, she bathed and freshened, and knelt to respect the goddess as well as the parents and then entered into the apartment with all essential tools, handloom, cotton, colour, etc. and closed the door.

Now, her real struggle began. She was more interested in weaving than in anything else in the world. She calmly managed to bear the challenge that had come to her. She faced the difficulty resolutely. She never lost her tenacity.

Weaving had several phases like ginning, carding, rubbing, dyeing, mounting the warp elements lengthwise, and shuttling the weft elements breadth-wise, etc. Naithakbi started the work methodically & solemnly; and went on completing one phase after another systematically and meticulously. Hours after hours, days

after days rolled on. She went on working relentlessly. Daily at the end of her day, she would be so tired that she slept a sound sleep. Indeed, she would fall asleep as soon as her body had been thrust on the bed.

Daily she used to wake before the rise of the red tinge in the easteren horizon and before cock-crowing. Daily she would get bathed & freshened right at dawn. Thus, she took utmost care to achieve excellence and perfection in the work. She had thus passed about two months with single-minded devotion.

One day her father told: My dear daughter! you have been reduced in health & brightness; you are now weak & pale; your eyes have sunk. You drop the idea, and come out. I shall arrange your marriage with an excellent young man. I can not bear your pain. Naithakbi replied: Respected father! so far I have a good deal to do. I shall not abandon my plan halfway. I shall not deviate from my target. Kindly wait a few days more. Please do not distract me.

The father appreciated the tenacity of the daughter, and encouraged her and blessed her from the core of his heart. Never in his life he had been defeated, and his daughter too would not submit & surrender.

Naithakbi daily advanced in mastering the art of weaving the fabric. By trial & error, by imagination & industriousness she was gaining success in giving effect to the fabric. Instead of one, she started weaving two pieces of clothe simultaneously.

It took three months thirteen days to compele the work of weaving one pair of clothe. During this period, she used to meditate at dawn before starting the day's work. To-day Naithakbi's joy knew no bound. She cheerfully came out of the room and strolled before the parents and gave them the good news. The news came as a great relief to them. They heaved a sigh of relief. After so many days the three smiled together.

Naithakbi was eagerly waiting to give the same news

to the goddess. It was morning; she had to wait till noon; time was passing, as if, slowly. When it was about noon she went to that very lonely place and making obeisance to the goddess *Hâichukma*, gave the news. As expected, the oracle came from the forest thus: Naithakbi, with exemplary dedication, devotion and discipline, you have followed my advice & complete the work. Now you arrange the worship of *Khulumâ* and *Hâichukmâ*. After the worship, send the clothes to the capital through your father. Tell your father to hand over the clothes to the junior *Hajari* for doing the needful. I have instructed the junior *Hajari* through dream revelation. Your excellent work will qualify you to become the queen. I bless you.

Nâithakbi made a vow to the goddess and came back home with contentment and informed the parents about the oracle. The parents called in the village priest; the *ojhai* on the nearest auspicious date officiated the worship and sacrificed two cocks; and the clothes packed with *Lâirok* leaf (*Phrynium imbricatum*) into two separate packets were placed before the altar of the goddesses for blessing.

The next vow was to send the clothes to the capital. Nâithakbi's father was naturally in a mood of hurry. So the old *Senâpati* and Chhadarai decided to set out the very next day. Chhadarai, who wished to accompany his elder brother, had a desire to kill two birds with one stone: to see his own daughter and to keep company with the aged elder brother in a long journey. The old *Senâpati* hastened and woke at dawn and awoke the younger brother. The two brothers bathed & freshened and started their journey early in the morning with the two packets of clothes and *mochâ bhât* (=rice packets). They soon left their village; they had to pass through hills & jungles, valleys &streams. The temperature was cool and the birds were singing melodious songs. The village paths were winding and uneven with ups & downs. They drank cool water of the brooks and took their lunch. At times they sat in the shade of some big trees and talked to each other.

After a long & tedious journey, they at last reached the house of the junior *Hajari* in the capital. Punangti was very glad to see them after a long time, and offered them water, seat and some fruits. After the inital talk they again bathed, freshened, ate and went to bed. They were so tired that they fell asleep as soon as their heads touched the pillows.

After a sound sleep, they woke up in the following morning with cool temperament. After getting freshened, they sat together. Punangti offered them *âoâng bângai* (a kind of aromatic rice cake). Her father brought the rice from home. The old *Senâpati* was narrating, while the junior *Hâjâri* was attentively listening. The old *Senâpati* said: the royal proclamation carried a shocking news to them. For about four months their sleep was troubled. They were in tension. Nâithakbi became restless and resentful. One day she alone went to the field, cried there and suddenly heard an oracle. Henceforth, she became confident to face the challenge. For three months & thirteen days she remained in solitude & alone concentrating her full attention. She struggled for a long time. The two packets of clothe are the product of her devotion & discipline. You take the packets and do the needful.

Punangti opened the packets and jumped up with joy to see the superb quality of the clothes. The junior *Hâjâri* remarked : This is the best of the lot so far received for consideration, and assured to do the needful. After one day's rest, the two brothers turned their steps homeward.

In response to the royal proclamation, the artists sent several clothes to the office of the *Mahâmantri*. The *Mahâmantri* preserved & displayed those clothes with marks of individual identification. The artists wove beautiful & intricate clothes showing skill in subtle array of colour combination. The displayed clothes attracted the attention of many, including the minister, the nobles

and even the king. For a judgement and final decision the *Mahâmantri* had to wait till the last minute of the time-limit.

However, at the last moment mysteriously there came a pair of unanimous clothes. The junior *Hâjâri* surreptitiously draped the clothes sent by Nâithakbi. No doubt, Nâithakbi wove brilliant clothes, showing delicate workmanship in developing abstract patterns by using her eyes & hands for line & measurement. Her fantastic clothes alone fulfilled the requirements of the royal proclamation.

The *Mahârâjâ* had security guards & attendants to move before & after him. The next day the king was usually coming to the council room. He was casually looking at the clothes. He had other important business to attend to. But he was surprised to see the fantastic clothes; however, he remarked nothing then & there. Sitting in the council room, he drew the attention of the minister. The *Mahamantri* rushed to the spot; he was excited to see those fantastic clothes, and cogently argued that that very pair of clothes fully conformed to the conditions set by the royal proclamation.

But who did all these things : weaving, bringing and draping? It seemed to be enigmatic. Some mysterious hands might be at work! The ministers and the guards racked their brains to locate any possible lacuna in the security system. With the consent of the king, the minister had arranged an all-round search all over the kingdom; but no clue was found out. The last resort left out was a royal proclamation. Again with the royal consent, the proclamation announced through the communication network & declared that who so ever could correctly identify the artist within seven days, would be amply rewarded.

No response came within the first six days. The atmosphere in the royal court was awkward & uneasy. When the noon of the seventh day had gone, the condition

took a serious turn. Some of the ministers & officers sat with their heads cast downward; others were making apprehension. The *Mahâmantri* was seized with chillness and dizziness. Finally, the king himself expressed his great anxiety. The reserved nature and unobstrusive character of Nâithakbi frustrated all operations of search and all declarations of the proclamation.

The time was very short. Every moment was suspenseful. The last moment was just before sunset: twilight hour of cow-dust. The domestic animals were returning home; the birds were taking the nests. The weather was cool with gentle breeze blowing. Now, the junior *Hâjâri* came to the royal court hurry-scurry. He said: *Mahâraj*! a positive response has come just now; the whereabouts of the artist have been traced. If the *Mahâraj* be kind enough to permit, I may try to bring forward the artist here.

The king said: Go as early as possible. Bring her here. All the ministers & officers were very eagerly waiting.

Having honourably kept Naithakbi in his own house in the capital two days back, the junior *Hâjâri* was waiting till the eleventh hour for a climax. Now, with a triumphant mood and a hawking signal the junior *Hâjâri* brought Naithakbi to the royal court. The moment she set steps in, there was a shout of joy, some holding their hands towards heaven, and others to the king. The king stared at her for a few seconds. Is that you Naithak? Besotted by her power of fascination, the young king, neglecting the courtly etiquette, went to embrace her. While they talked about her, she stood a little apart from the others, watching them with a serene expression. The prince spoke with emotion & authority. She smiled modestly & listened politely. She puzzled them as much as she had done a few years ago. Her youthful frolicking had now matured into serene beauty.

The king's enthusiastic request to make Naithakbi's

stay comfortable in the house of the junior *Hâjâri* sounded pleasant in his ears. The king said: Naithak! forgive me, for any mistake on my part.

At that time, the bright fortnight was running. The *Mahamantri* and his colleagues worked on a war-footing to duly & gorgeously accomplish the marriage ceremony. With almost all the neighbours & the relatives, the old *Senâpati* attended the marriage ceremony in the capital. The priests chanted prayers and solemnised the marriage infront of the holy fire. The goddess *Hâichukmâ* and the goddess *Khulumâ* were duly worshipped.

Naithakbi was no longer the mirthful girl who had led her friends in games & sports; she was no longer the laborious peasant girl who had to go to the field for weeding and for collecting vegetables. She was now the dignified queen, controlling the royal household and occasionally facing the troubles of the crown. The royal prestige with all pomp & luxury, was to surround her. They were, as if, made for each other. They had a happy life, and they ruled the kingdom wisely. In arithmetic, one plus one make two. In genuine love one plus one make one. At last in their old age the royal couple fell like over-ripe fruit.

14. The two brothers

Several centuries ago, in the hill tract of Tripura, there was a king named Phân Kârâk. He was a just, powerful & popular king. The Tripuri king had been raised above all other chiefs. The subjects lived in amity & peace. The king had his residence near Rângâmâti in the upper courses of the river Gomati. His paternal administration won the respect of the subjects. Rangamati was recognised as ruling over all other settlements, without, however, interfering in their internal affairs.

The king had his beautiful and efficient queen named Nakhâfilik. They had two sons named Kutungrây & Kucungrây. The king loved his wife and children. The king was happy & content with what he had. His main

care was bestowed on the capital. The ancient capital was a country town, depending on gathering, hunting, fishing & farming. There was little to suggest that Rangâmati was associated with tragedy in the past and was to experience more of it.

In those days, the hills of Tripura were forest-clad; forest growth was thick under the influence of heavy rainfall from the Bay of Bangal. The territory had uneven topograpy. Then the inhabitants were scattered in small groups. The houses of the hills people had construction of bamboo & thatching grass on a raised platform. Each household had a house. Several households of the same clan or community used to reside in a hamlet on hill-top. Each household had its temporary & seasonal hut dispersed about the field. Each community had its chief & a council of elders. They were all peasants; shifting cultivation, hunting, fishing, gathering, basketry & weaving were their livelihood. The people could not travel so comfortably during those days as they do now. Any notion of ancient Tripura as a comfortable land of lazy summer was only partly true.

But the royal family was not long destined to enjoy the bliss of happiness. The king had all-forbearing attachment to the queen. The queen had a life-long devotion to the king. However, affected by some disease, the queen was keeping sometimes well, and sometimes bad. Slowly & slowly her health was deteriorating. It called forth the services of all concerned. Priests, exorcists, quacks, shamans were called in. But they failed. The queen tossed and argued to herself: if the king marries again, my sons will be ill-treated by their step-mother. So, I must try to obtain a pledge from the king not to marry again. Anyway, her days were being numbered. She expressed her anxiety & sought an assurance from the king. The king assured to make a reasonable promise. At the eleventh hour, in response to the last will of the queen, the sad king placed his

hands on the heads of their sons and promised not to marry again. So, sincere was the tone, so pathetic was the appeal that, the king was moved to take the vow. The queen breathed her last; and funeral rites were duly performed.

The death of the queen made the king very sorrowful and caused him to sit down & to take to his bed, with closed eyes & in silence and uttered few words in reply to questions addressed to him. With a mild smile of sympathy & sorrow, the king started looking after the sons. He preferred this duty to those of the kingdom. In delirious mood, he would have the vision of the queen with her passionate eyes & shy face.

The nobles, the ministers and the chief of the army, who formed an advisory council, grew worried. They did not try to get the administration into their own hands. Theirs was not an aristocracy or oligarchy. But the consequent weakness of the kingdom was so tempting to some wild people that, they finally decided to convince the king for remarriage. Since then they subtly & singly made many unseccessful attempts to make the formal proposal of remarriage. Far from agreeing, to the hint, he would refute it. At the time of such a serious discussion, he would often leap up and pace with rapid steps about the room. One day they jointly came together and politely made the formal proposal of remarriage. The king turned down the proposal. He strolled calmly & magestically and remarked: It would set a very bad example; how can a law-maker be a law-breaker? I am helpless! I can not comply with your request.

What might have been a difficult problem to others, was a matter of a moment's thought to the chief minister. He made an alternative plan of making the same appeal through the elderly chiefs of various communities & villages. He sent his trusted men to them with an invitation to come to the capital on a particular auspicious day during the ensuing dewy season. Accordingly, they

took the trouble of coming to the capital. The chief minister made necessary arrangement for their comfortable stay, and briefed them about their mission & vision. It was presented in a well-planned strategy; it looked like this: the chiefs themselves had taken the initiative of seeking the advice of His Royal Highness about their wishes & desires. They sought an interview.

The chief minister knew the art of handling men. He arranged the interview in a befitting manner and protocol. When the king stepped in, all the chiefs & councillors stood up and duly paid homage. Bereaved & heartbroken, the king affectionately looked at them and leered. The veteran chiefs, one after another, very politely opened their mouths and made humble submission. They said: *Mahârâj*! you are our father, we are your children. But we have lost our kind-hearted mother recently. Now who will look after us? We are helpless orphans. We are eager to see our mother again. May His Royal Highness cherish the wishes & desires of His children in His mind!

The king sat in silence, without answering , without interference, without smile. He was in a dilemma, in a trying practical problem, in a contradictory situation. He agrued to himself: being a scion of the illustrious Lunar dynasty, what should I do? should I commit the crime of breach of trust? or should I opt for the welfare of the subjects? The history of the Lunar dynasty is replete with instances in which the kings sacrificed their lives for the welfare of the subjects.

The king at last said: Let your earnest desire be fulfilled. Do as you like. Do not be hasty.

The chiefs & the ministers & the nobles were eagerly & silently waiting for a word from their dear king. Now, they were happy with the royal consent. They bowed with gratitude and left. Their words of joyous praise for the king resounded in the air.

At this stage, the young king's fate was taking a remarkable turn. The chief minister, in consultation with

the chief of the army, cast about for a beautiful bride for the king. The chief of the army sent instructions to his staff to look about . The nobles were also searching for a suitable mate. The village chiefs also became active. At last they heard the news of a handsome girl residing at the distant village of Nikrâ *Sardâr*. A vast extent of wilderness lay between Rangamati & that remote village. The chief of the army accompanied by a few nobles went there to see the girl and to talk to her parents. She stood up to their expectation. They selected her. It was beyond the expectation of Nikrâ *Sardâr*; he entertained the guests duly & eagerly. The chief of the army returned and informed the chief minister.

The chief minister, in turn, brought the news to the ear of the king. With the royal consent, the chief minister and the chief of the army coordinated the grand ceremony of royal marriage. It was a brilliant & dazzling panorama. The captain arrayed his troops. The king set out riding on elephant, and he was accompanied by the ministers, nobles, soldiers. Musicians played music; the royal servants were paraded to shout the cry of victory of the king. Elephants were decorated. Incense was burning. Every participant arrayed himself in his best clothes. The marriage was duly solemnised amidst feast, drinking. The village became overcrowded with enthusiastic people. The king's presence added to the prestige of the village.

The wedding celebrations over, the king returned with all his entourage. The king left behind the gifts presented by Nikra *Sardar*, and allowed the queen to take her clothes & cosmetics only packed up in a big wooden box (*Sindhuk*). The box was put to the boat. The king & the queen embarked the same boat. Far below several miles downstream lay the capital city, in the wide valley of the meandering river Gomati. House by house, hamlet by hamlet, field by field, disappeared into the Gomati's maw. However, the king along with his followers returned to Rangamati. The capital became rosy. The royal servants

lifted the box out of the boat and placed it in a corner of the queen's chamber.

The king never forgot, through all those hectic days, of the needs of his sons. As the bustle died down, the king called in the two sons; it was a moment of tragic sorrows & poignant joys. Anxious to see the dear sons well looked after, the king said to the new queen: I now hand over my dear sons to you; they are yours to love & care for; treat them as your own children.

When the king had been saying, the queen took them in her motherly arms, and caressed them and tried to delight them by various ways. The warm-hearted welcome seemed to be agreeable & pleasing to the children; they made favourable response, and started addressing her as mother. They adored her; they felt unhappy away from her.

This motherly love was shared by everyone in the palace. Her charm, her eloquence, her wit were qualities praised even by the servants. The life in the palace seemed to be a holiday. The in-mates had gay times together. The personal attraction of the young queen mesmerised the king. The king now hardly recollected the memory of Nakhâfilik. The king bent a willing ear to the whims & wishes of the new queen. The king took delight in making her life as happy as possible.

Day after day, month after month went by. Thus one year elapsed. But the new queen took the matter in a manner different from that which the king & the minister had expected. She was no longer a rural damsel of a peasant; now she attained dignity & recognition. A curious change occurred in the new queen herself; she tended to insult & discourage her step-sons by emphasising their mistakes. She snubbed them. She nagged. Henceforth, the children dreaded to go home and never went near the chamber of the step-mother. They preferred their father to the step-mother. The political implication of the new queen's behaviour lay in

her motherly ambition to have her own son recognised as the heir to the throne.

Her ambition commensurated with her personal attractions. But she had very little talent and very imperfect education. She had little sense of political affairs. Born & brought up in an environment of country liquor & magic, she was ready to embark upon a course of action which would bring her name & fame. So, she decided that at any cost the obstacles must be displaced. Now she could hardly bear the sight of the children. Animated by ambition, and bedeviled by jeolousy, she played the tricks of alienating the king from the children. Forcing her way into his chamber, she would often pretend to complain & weep thus: My Lord, you spend your time in official business and in looking after the children. You find no scope to sit by my side and spend even a few seconds in gossip & in chatter. The presence of the grown up children is a hindrance to our private talks.

The king assured the new queen, and the very next day called in one dependable midwife or wet-nurse, and directed her to look after the two sons exclusively. The king particularly added: Be vigilant to check the entry of the two sons into the chamber of the new queen especially during my presence therein. Thus, beloved & petted by the wet-nurse, the two children grew through unhappy childhood. They used to sleep with the wet-nurse in the same room. The middle-aged wet-nurse was brimful of affection. She treated them like her own sons. She would feed & put them to bed & sing lullaby.

There was a little disparity in the age between the king and the queen; but it did not hinder the swift budding of one of the famous love affairs in the history of Tripura. The king was as healthy at thirty five as at twenty five. After a period of single life, the king found in the graceful queen a delicious creature. She too let loose her passions. The king had a hundred affairs to look to. But

he neglected them; he forgot the memory of Nakhafilik. He hardly asked about the news of the two sons.

The king was fond of hunting. He enjoyed the excitement of the adventure of hunting deer, hare, buffalo, porcupine & hog. The depredations of elephant, tiger, leopard, monkey, fox & bear were quite common during those days. So, hunting was a sport as well as a duty. One day in such an adventure the king's retinue caught a beautiful mayna bird for the king. The king gave the sons that very beautiful bird. The sons were glad to nurse & feed the bird; they tweedle the bird affectionately.

For a few years, the two brothers had been under the care of the wet-nurse. The elder brother grew frolic enough to play with other boys. But the younger brother remained tender; he had longing for paternal love & affection. This emotional yearning tended him for a look out to find his father alone and to sit in the comfortable lap of the father. The step-mother could not tolerate it; she would chide the boy. She would take offence.

The two unhappy brothers were thus leading a life of mental agony. And then a strange thing happened. One day the younger brother was searching his father. He moved helter-skelter, but did not find his father. At last, hesitatingly & cautiously he went near the step-mother's room and peeped through a very narrow opening. At that moment, the step-mother was putting inside the wooden box a dish of *Sandesh* (= sweetmeat). The young brother saw it to be an offering to some deity. He remained silent. The perception was inadequate to cause a doubt.

After a few days, the younger brother, again in search of the father, went near the room of the step-mother and peeped through a very narrow opening. That day, he observed a very strange thing. The step-mother opened the wooden box's lid; she was talking to a strange fellow. The strange fellow was inside the box. The younger brother got frightened and fled. It confirmed his doubt of the previous day. He saw it from behind the door.

Meanwhile, the bad news of a major crime came from the hills. The Kuki people were committing plundering; they were looting & scooting. Rice, tools, crops, cattle, young boys & girls were their targets. It was a recurring nuisance. The communication alarmed the king. The king, and the chief of the army and the soldiers immediately set out and left the capital to punish the offenders.

The absence of the king was a bliss in disguise to the queen. It gave her a golden opportunity. She issued a direction & forbade the entry of the attending servants into her room. The doors & windows were shut from inside. Now, she would off & on open the lid of the box to facilitate the exit of the strange fellow. His name was Phatikray. He was a strong & strout young man. The strict prohibition annoyed the attendants; they became surprised & suspicious. They secretly tried to eavesdrop.

But who was Phatikray? He was a native of the locality of Nikra *Sardar*. Phatikray rendered many duties to the household of Nikra *Sardar*. Phatikray devoted himself to serving the family and to pleasing the charming daughter of the *Sardâr*. Phatikray was very passionately fond of Nâithakti. Naithakti too deeply loved Phatikray. Implicitly, the *Sardâr* had a mind to arrange the marriage of his daughter with Phatikray. But the proposal from the royal family made him unsteady; he wavered; he was in a dilemma. It filled him with a great ambition for worldly pomp & pleasure, prestige & position. He agreed. And the marriage was splendidly solemnised. Phatikray did not dare to intercept & oppose; he was deeply attached to Naithakti; and Naithakti had mentally chosen Phatikray as her husband. The infiltration of Phatikray through the wooden box was the result of their joint connivance. The *Sardar* was unaware of it.

Now what did the eavesdroppers observe? Phatikray & the queen (=Naithakti) were found indulging in all sorts of amorous pleasures. Their clandestine affairs were

astonishing, shocking to the eavesdroppers. They raised their eyebrows. They whispered. They retreated. They did not disclose it.

Just after a few days, another episode happened. The king was in the battle fields. The attendants were busy. The dependable midwife was in her room. The two brothers were passing their time carelessly. The new queen & Phatikray had laid sportingly awake for about an hour in the bed. They hugged emotionally, huddled promiscuously and slept barely.

The Mayna had been so thoroughly tamed and domesticated that its confinement in a cage was no longer required. The bird would stroll about leisurely. The bird's sweet call would often be heard across the room. That very day when Phatikray & the queen had fallen asleep barely, the bird trespassed into the room of the queen. The two brothers rushed to catch the bird. In hot pursuit, they had to force their entry. They immediately returned with the bird, but the scene stupefied them. The elder brother hurriedly threw his wrapper over her body and ran rather then walked towards his own room.

On waking, the queen saw the wrapper, and anticipated the arrival of the elder prince in her room. Anxious about the consequences of the disclosure of the clandestine affairs, she was about to beat her forehead in affright. It alarmed her terribly. It would not fail to bring danger to both! She soon found herself in extreme trouble when she considered herself very unsafe. How to get rid of it? The time was pressing! For the first time since Phatikray had known her, he saw tears in her eyes!

Phatikray said: Naithak! I have a plan. If you follow it, you will be saved. And the two boys will be removed for ever. The king will be coming back within a few days. Before his arrival, shreds of earthen pot & dry splits of bamboo must be stashed carefully inside the folds of your bed. You are to toss this side & that side and pretend to

suffer from a sever pain of bone-ache. Waking in the dead of night, you should hem, pant & sob to draw the attention of the attendants. All I ask you is to follow my direction carefully. But the queen pressed him with loving importunity to disclose his secret strategy. Phatikray declined.

She agreed then & there and requested Phatikray to do the needful. Under the cover of darkness of evening, Phatikray collected shreds and bamboo-splits, and carefully placed those materials inside the folds of her bed.

From that very night, she started to machinate. The peal of her shrill voice could be heard across the palace, and her incessant outbursts of pain were audible to all who lived near her room. The attendants duly informed the chief minister. The chief minister, in consultation with his colleagues, pondered and called in the wellknown *ojhas*, the *vaidyas*, the priests and the exorcists. The sad news alarmed them all. They had a meeting and decided to apply their special knowledge. Thus, their endeavour to make a clean sweep of the troublesome pain took several forms: the use of talisman, the application of herbal medicine, the offering of worship, divination, and the drinking of water sanctified through spells, and the expulsion of evil spirits by beating about in every corner of the room. But in vain! The intensity of mock pain was increasing. It created a stir, a tension. The chief minister himself became confused and worried. He was anxiously waiting for the king.

Having completed the expedition, the king returned home. The king's return alarmed the queen. She intensified the mockery. To show her dysthesia, to indicate her sufferings & sensations, to draw the attention of the king, she disposed a kind of wildness. She started tossing, throwing herself about from side to side in bed ; the shreds and the splits were breaking with sharp crack.

The ministers and the nobles were counting every moment for the arrival of the king. They thronged in front of the main gate of the palace. The king arrived and listened to the hot news. The king marched straight to the inner apartment of the palace. The king wasted no time listening to the details of the attempts. Hearing the king talking to the queen, the faithful midwife, who was inside looking after the two princes, came to the door. There was a dire need of the service of a very competent physician & magician. The king had the authority to mash up all the departments into uniform & rapid action. Accordingly, he ordered to find out the most competent physician & magician, and announced to pay him substantial rewards. After all those preparations, the king retired to make up all the sleep & rest he had lost during the expedition.

Time wore on. But the situation was pressing. The chief minister's name was Kâcâgray. One day, in the afternoon, Kâcâgray went to his office. The office building was in front of the palace. He had a sullen look. He was deeply thinking about the queen's disease, about the marriage proposal, about the initiative taken by him, and about the seriousness of the problem. He was lying on the sofa. He was anxiously watching the passers-by along the road. His eyes often seemed to be fixed on the distant sky. Was my enthusiasm a mistake? He asked himself.

Meanwhile, a shaggy-headed man with a bamboo stick in his hand was strolling there. He had a suspicious look. He deliberately looked towards the office with squint-eyes. What was it he wanted? The chief minister winked. He came forward and claimed himself a diviner (= *Diâri* = *Disâri*). The chief minister opened the door. The diviner went in & sat. The chief minister was obviously expecting some remedy from the stranger. The stranger admitted his own capacity to cure the disease of the queen. Kâcâgray's face at once resumed its graceful expression. Without any delay, the chief minister sent a

messenger to the king. The king permitted the entry of the diviner.

The king himself came to the door to welcome the diviner. The diviner observed the queen and closed his eyes for a few minutes. He became serious. A short while after, he opened his eyes and looked around. He said not a word to the king. His silence made the king worried. The impatient king excitedly said: Oh diviner! tell me how to cure the queen! At any cost, cure her. In exchange of all the property of my kingdom, cure her. The king entreated him.

Treating the kingdom as his personal property, the worried king, was even ready to sacrifice all the property. The wicked diviner was mentally happy to see the anxious king. His eyes rolled & sparkled. He took the critical moment to monstrously exaggerate the danger of the disease. He said: *Mahârâj*! the queen's disease is a fatal one. Hardly a few patients survive in such a case. The name of the disease is *Hâr mur muri rog*. It is not inflamation of the bones, it is a rare case of brittleness of the bones. Its treatment is peculiar and difficult. Only blood-bath can cure it; that too the patient's child's blood. No physician, no magician, can cure her. This is much needed.

It surprised and disheartened the king. The queen had no child. How can it be possible? Is there any other alternative? The king became very restless. The king said: I will try to satisfy you with any thing you demand. I shall go to the extreme. I shall keep my word.

The cunning diviner stood up and said: I want to say one word only. This is my last & final word. As per my divination, the two princes have to be sacrificed, and with their blood, the queen has to be bathed.

The diviner strutted out silently and vanished.

The perplexed king became very, very grieved. The remedy seemed to be very cruel. The king was in a dilemma. The future seemed to him to be very dark &

uncertain. He became morbid & nervous. The bewildered king sat in a corner. The ministers and the nobles gathered to comfort the king. The king sought the opinion of the chief minister. What ought I to do? The chief minister stood with head downcast and tears rolling down. They observed a violent ferment working in the mind of the king. After allowing the sympathisers to leave, the king retired to his chamber and sat a long while, pondering the terrible remedy. The king was confronted with a very serious problem. The king had the closest relation with the princes, as well as with the queen. Whom to sacrifice? Whom to safeguard? He was afraid of grieving either. At last, the king himself decided in favour of the queen.

The next morning the royal decision was made public. It produced a great atonement, astonishment, depression, grief, horror and weeping in the palace. The servants and attendants were weeping. The ministers and the nobles again rushed to the palace. The chief minister made his humble submission thus : *Maharaj !* your decision taken in a moment of bewilderment seems to be hasty. A major decision on the basis of a mere unknown diviner seems to be unwise. The sacrifice of your living successors appears to be a fatal mistake. The king said: I have thought, and thought again of the proposal of the diviner. Had the revelation after deep meditation been not true, why did he say so? I find no personal interest in his divination. The diviner made the correct prescription. You have arranged this marriage. Now if she does not survive, wherein lies my happiness? How shall I live alone? If she survives, she will bear children. So, do not dissuade me. Let the sons be sacrificed; let the queen survive.

The assembled sympathisers did not dare to argue further. With broken hearts & tearful eyes, they fell back. They nudged each other and whined and winked. Soon the news turned into rumour. It evoked mixed reaction

and market-place remarks : The king has lost all his sanity; the king has become henpecked. The old women tended to beat their foreheads; some of them tended to hide their faces in their hands; some of them sobbed. What a demoniac disease! *Hâr mur muri rog*? such a peculiar name was never heard before. Who knows, some evil spirit has taken possession of her!

It was the duty of Kalakrây to execute a capital punishment. Kalakray was the son of the reliable midwife. The midwife's name was Mâilumâ. The chief minister's name was Kâcâgrây. The name of the army-chief was Kitingrây. The executioner was ordered to sacrifice the two princes: Kutungray and Kucungray. The chief minister and the army-chief were to supervise the sacrifice. And the affectionate midwife was to accompany the princes. The princes were informed. Preparations were going on for the execution. Many people came to see the princes; they were weeping, hugging the princes and offering the princes sweets. The situation was very pathetic, gloomy and tragic. The executioner was ready with his heavy and sharp *Khadga*. With one sweep of the sword, he had to behead an accused criminal.

Today, sometime before the sunset, amidst weeping, panting, sobbing, & forehead beating, the executioner along with the princes, the midwife, the chief minister and the army-chief started southward to sacrifice the princes. The two princes were in the middle of the line. They were silently trudging. The death of their mother was painful to all, but fatal to the princes. The affectionale midwife was weeping continuously, and she earnestly appealed to the chief minister and the army-chief to save the princes anyhow. The younger prince was bold & intelligent; he said: Please do not weep, do not lament; we are Kshatriya princes; we are not afraid of death. You go back; you will not be able to bear the tragic scene. The princes sought from the executioner a few minutes for the last prayer to their mother. They took the horror

more calmly than a he-goat going to be offered for sacrifice. The helpess beast bleats; they did not cry. The princes, with folded hands, stood facing eastward and prayed to their late mother :

Oh mother! you are in heaven. We do not know whether you are observing our sufferings. At the time of your death, you requested the father to look after us, and appealed to him not to marry again. He did not keep his pledged word; he married again. Now, he has sent the executioner to sacrifice us and to collect our blood, with which the step-mother will bathe. Where are you, mother? You descend and see your sons at the last moment!

The two brothers hugged each other and went on crying, weeping, sobbing, and panting. The chief minister, the army-chief, the midwife could not resist their tears; they stood in grim silence. Suddenly, the sky became overcast with black clouds. The mighty thunder & lightning broke the silence. The rain was falling heavily. The hailstorm and tempest deluged the surroundings. No voice could be heard. The tempest was dashing, hurling & whirling the nearby trees. The wind was shrieking past the ears of the attendants. The funeral place of the late queen was there nearby. Moreover, breaking out of the funeral place, black smoke burst forth tremendously. There was an explosive rumble. The eruption benighted the attendants. Affected with eerie, they fled hurriedly.

The affectionate midwife said: My dear son, here is a golden opportunity, heaven-sent scope to save the life of the princes. You move immediately along with the princes and leave them deep into the forest and advise them not to come back; keep it absolutely secret. When the executioner abandoned the princes in the deep forest, the darkness had already been very horribly thick. The forest was full of wild animals. With tears in his voice, the executioner said: Go away, go away! *भाग, राजकुमार, भाग !*

Where are we to go?- The princes asked.
The executioner replied: I do not know. Go away, go away, go far away, do not return home! Kalakray begged them to forgive & forget. Kalakray rushed to the funeral ground.

There were pariah dogs in the funeral place. Kalakray and his mother caught a dog and sacrificed it with a *Khadga* and put blood inside a bamboo pipe & placed the pipe before the king. He was pretentiously sobbing, panting, weeping! The ministers and the nobles were there to console the king. Blood, blood! My son's blood? Crushed by the tragedy, the paternal emotion awoke; the heart-broken father cried out loudly : I have nothing to live for! what is the use of my life? My dear sons have been sacrificed! If she dies what matters?

The ministers & the nobles uttered comforting words. The attendants brought water. The king washed his face. He was panting and sobbing. Slowly & slowly, the king came down to normalcy. The chief minister very softly said: *Mahârâj*! the urgent need of the hour is to save the life of the queen. If she survives, you will be blessed with children. You are our lord, you are our father. No purpose will be served, if you are lost in grief.

The king, at last, shook his head. The midwife brought the bamboo pipe in which the blood had been kept. The queen had been ill in bed for some days. She was straining her ear to catch any sound & signal. The attendants carefully nursed her and treated her with the blood and water. Surprisingly, she came back to health then & there! She became quite well again. It was a great relief to all: the attendants, the ministers, the nobles and the king!

All the sympathisers retired to their houses & rooms. At night the king went to the room of the queen in a state of disappointment & frustration. The king was grieved. The notorious queen made a mockery of grief; she said: *Mahârâj*, on this occasion I have been saved by your magnanimity. But I should have rather died. At the

cost of the valuable lives of the two bright princes, I have got back my life. That is all.

The king was plunged in sorrow. It destroyed the power of understanding. The queen's word of solace was a false show. The emotional king could not realise the deception & treachery of the queen. The king rather reversely tried to console the cunning queen. He said: please do not be impatient, do not grieve. If you remain alive, I shall have more children. You may rest assured. How happy I am to have found you cured! After hearing these words of solace, the queen chuckled.

The chief minister, the army-chief and the councillors were astonished. They talked to each other: The two bright princes have been slain for the sake of the new queen's recovery! Now, they were bewildered. They tended to avoid the sight of the king. The cruel decision of the king, the strange divination of the diviner, the peculiar disease of the queen made them perplexed. They were wearing sad faces. One of them asked: Do you know the young diviner? Where did he come from? Where did he vanish? Another councillor remarked: The diviner did not accept any gift. So, he would be a saintly man. None of them did suspect!

The diviner was, indeed, the lover of the queen. He was Phatikray. He came in the disguise of a diviner. Having secluded conversation with the queen and prescribing blood-bathe, he decamped. And when the tension got subsided, he secratly took shelter inside the big wooden box. The intrigue of Phatikray was known to the queen only in the palace.

The two princes now found themselves exiled in a dense forest, infested with wild animals. It was pitch-dark. There was no human habitation in the vicinity. However threatening the danger, they met it with perfect calm & confidence. At such a crisis, the supernatural power of their mother seemed to them a tower of strength. The executioner could have cut them with one sweep of

the sword. But he did not. Suddenly, there came storm, tempest, lightening, thunder, black smock. The mother's grace made the explosive rumble possible. Our mother heard & responded to our appeal. So, let us appeal again. This time too, she will save us. With unbounded belief in the ability of the mother, they made an appeal: Mother! you have miraculously saved us from the sword of the executioner; he has abandoned us here, in this dense forest; growl & howl, squeak & gabble are being heard from all around; the wild beasts may attack us at any moment; Mother! save us, save us.

The two brothers hugged each other; they were weeping, panting & sobbing. The natural calamity was no longer there. Meanwhile, the two brothers saw a shadowy human figure; the figure silently beckoned them with the hands to follow him. The elder brother wiped his tears and observed minutely for confirmation. No, it was no mistake; the figure earnestly made a signal for them to follow him. Like a spell-bound simpleton, the two brothers followed the shadow and toddled and walked hand in hand a distance. Then & there the shadow suddenly vanished. The two brothers found themselves in a safe place. A big tree stood there; the tree had a big hollow. They took shelter & slept inside the hollow. The ferocious animals began to prowl about. They spent the night full of fear & misery.

The unfortunate princes lay a long while in the cavity and had a bad dream. It was not yet dawn; a crimson tinge was yet to glow in the east. The frightful noises of wild beasts had stopped. The fated moment had arrived; and somebody called the princes from outside and told them to escape immediately. At that time, as always indeed, the kings or the rulers had spies and informants. So, the princes must escape to safety. The princes hurried out through the hole. They forced their way through the deep forest and pushed aside the thatching grasses, creepers & shrubs which obstructed their track.

They went on in darkness. They were marching farther & farther away from their home. The more they walked, the more was the thickness of the forest. At last at dawn a crimson tinge was glowing in the east. Quite forlorn by fatigue, thirst, anxiety, hunger and drowsiness, they sat down. The younger brother said: Elder brother! I am quite exhausted. Please bring water. The elder brother too was equally tired & thirsty; he said: you wait here. I am trying my best to fetch water. Do not go elsewhere & wait till my return.

The elder brother forced his way about the forest in search of water and reached a tangled square of paths. The spot was a sort of bamboozlement in which a few paths had met confusedly. He was a stranger there. Out of confusion, he stood there for a while, and then started going ahead northward on and saw from a distance a group of black fellows; with stick in everybody's hand; they were approaching southward. The elder brother became frightened; he suspected them to be the agents of the king. The king might have sent them to arrest us. The hillmen were astonished & asked him: oh boy! where is your house? here in this forest there is danger of wild beasts; why are you moving alone? danger may be fall at any time! Being overwhelmed by emotion, the prince, with tears in his voice, made an outbrust of the tragedy. The hillmen became very sympathetic. The senior hillman said: My boy! here in these desolate & solitary hilltracts danger from tiger & bear is very common. We, the hillmen do not dare to move alone without any stick, knife, etc. You are a mere child; where is your brother? Lead us to him. We have got water in our *Tilak* (= calabash of gourd); we shall offer him our drinking water. Thus, the hillmen, inquiring who his father was, discovered that the boy, whose brightness they were so much struck with, was the son of *Mahârâj* Phân Kârâk.

The two brothers were at about a few hundred yards away. There was deep forest in between the two spots.

Finding that it was difficult & dangerous to go forward and considering the sympathetic attitude of the hillmen, the elder brother thought it better to turn back. Accompanied by the hillmen, he turned back and returned there. The elder brother was crying and searching here & there anxiously & relentlessly. He apprehended: My brother has been devoured by a wild tiger. Otherwise, he would not have left the place. Why is he not responding? By the grace of Mailuma and Kalakray, we have been narrowly escaped. But now my brother has been a victim of a beastly attack! The hillmen tried to console the prince. They too searched. But no trace was found. It was afternoon. The hillmen said: Dear prince! time is short. It is not safe for us to wait here any longer. We shall do well, therefore, to lose no time here. Younger brother Kucungray may have taken shelter in a hamlet of some hillmen. If he survives, we shall definitely find him out. You do not get anxious. You move with us. Where will you go in this desolate & dense forest? You will stay with us. They offered two lumps of *Mâidul* (= baked rice-ball) and a quantity of drinking water. To the hungry boy, it was like nectar; he got back a little of energy. One hillman lifted the boy on his shoulder and carried him to their distant village. The tract of the country that lay before them was so wild as to be nearly uninhabited; they hardly met from time to time with some stranger journeying through it. The boy was weeping & weeping. No word of consolation could pacify him. The pang of separation was very painful to him. He was in a double wilderness.

Having stopped the younger brother to rest in the shade of a big tree, the elder brother went to fetch water. A short while after, being tormented with thirst, and being left alone, the younger brother journeyed through the trail of the elder brother. After advancing a distance, he reached the labyrinth; it was a meeting place of a few trails. It perplexed him. How to find out the correct trail?

Which trail had the elder brother followed to reach a stream, or a spring of water? Without much thinking, he advanced southward. He was exhausted. The long walk wore him out. The solitary, sylvan, winding track was exciting fear in his mind. He was crying & struggling ahead eerily. While crying over the missing of the elder brother, the younger brother was proceeding stumblingly and calling for him louldy: brother, brother. The tender & loving child of a king! what was his capacity for tedious journey? He was getting stumbled again & again; he was about to stop wearily. Often at the murmuring sound of the dry leaves, he would halt & cry louldy. Every moment he was expecting his brother to come with water in his hand to quench the thirst. But alas! However, after walking some distance farther, he came in sight of two hillmen. They were coming from the opposite direction. Upon hearing the cry of a child in the lonely forest, they hastened to help the child. They were surprised to see the handsome child. Whose child was he? How did he come here? Such a fine child was nowhere to be seen in the hills. It was tempting to caress the lovely child. The compassionate expression of the hillmen's face did not appear to be frightful to the child. They hold out their hands and affectionately took the boy to their lap, and wiped his tears. Instead of just crying & whining, the younger brother could now express his demands & desires in words and language. The boy babbly narrated his problems. From the obscure narration, it transpired to the two hillmen that the boy's name was Kucungray, & his father's name was *Râjâ* Phân Kârâk. They said, astonishingly, one to another: He is a prince! The tragedy of the prince saddened the hillmen. Sitting in the comfortable lap, the boy said: I am very thirsty. The hillmen offered drinking water from their *Tilak* (= calabash of gourd). The prince quenched his terrible thirst. He got back a little of energy. He started walking with the hillmen. They all walked a distance. The day

wore on. The prince fell exhausted. The junior hillman's name was Bagala; he carried the prince on his back, according to the direction of the senior hillman. The two hillmen again said one to another: The prince seems to be very hungry. Let us go to any hamlet and ask a little of food for the prince.

Accordingly, they went to a small hamlet and sought food. They halted there for a while; one family offered *Aâong bângai* (= a kind of rice cake). The prince was happy to eat the food. They resumed their journey. The prince was crying for his brother and wetnurse.

It was still some time, however, before their own village came in sight. It was afternoon. The names of the two hillmen were Kulâng *Sardâr* and Bagalâ. Bagalâ was junior to the *Sardâr*. They continued their journey. It was evening. They reached their village. Bagalâ handed the prince over to the *Sardâr*. Bagalâ left for his own home. The *Sardar's* wife's name was Tuinângti. The couple had no child. Taking the boy under his arm, the *Sardâr* climbed up the wooden staircase (= *yaklai*), and place the boy in the verandah. Now, crowing with pleasure, the *Sardâr*, called his wife: oh, Tuinangti! come sharp! I have found and rescued a treasure of gold on the wild track. See what I have brought here. Where are you? Come immediately. Tuinangti was cooking in the kitchen room; she rushed to the door. The *Sardâr* handed the boy over to his wife. In wonder & delight, she took the boy tenderly and pressed the boy lovingly & protectingly to her bosom. She made many inquiries about the boy. As yet, the boy had eaten nothing that day.

The anxious & exhausted boy had his eyes tearfull & puffed, and his face swelled. The sorrow-stricken boy had his legs scratched while passing through the bushes & thorns. Tuinangti took the boy to the rear verandah for washing. After that, she fed the boy. The *Sardâr* meanwhile arranged from *dangdâl* (= *Alnâ* = dress-stand) a few pieces of clean clothes for the boy to sleep on. The

tired boy had a sleep. Since then, Tuinangti had a son on her hands. Fate brought the boy from the perils to the warm hearts of the *Sardâr* and his wife. Subsequently, however, sleep would not come to the boy easily; the boy had to lie in bed & think of his brother.

The *Sardâr* was the headman of the village. Kulang was intelligent and industrious. He had the qualities of head & heart. So, he was popularly known as *Sardâr*. And the villagers selected him their headman. His financial position too was better than that of others. But he had no child. Now, it was a happy luck that he got a child. The *Sardâr* & his wife were now loving the boy as dearly as their own child.

To return to the elder brother. He was in the loving care of another group of passengers. Those hillmen, passing through the meandering & vicissitidinous trail, reached their village. Night descended. It was the village of the Bâchâl community. The village had its headman; his name was Khâ-Kalak *Sardâr*. Kha-kalak *Sardar*, the headman of the village, commanded the respect of the surrounding hamlets also. He was a popular and prominent person. So, the hillmen enjoyed a degree of safety & security under the paternal care of the *Sardâr*. That night the passengers took the elder brother to the house of the *Sardâr*. The *Sardâr* assured them & allowed them to retire to their house for rest. The *Sardâr* left the boy to the motherly arm of his wife for nursing & feeding.

The *Sardâr* had in his house a big, gigantic & heavy bell. The beating of the bell used to herald a situation of urgency & emergency. Its use was strictly restricted. Only at the order of the *Sardâr*, it could be used. In response to the communication through the bell-beating, the able-bodied villagers had to rush to the house of the *Sardâr* with arms, sticks, bows & arrows. That night, the *Sardar* directed his servant, Chamla, to strike the bell. The bell struck up. The bell tolled with a measured sound. The peasants had already returned from their

farms & fields; hearing the loud sound of the bell, they rushed to the house of the *Sardâr*. The armed men were like the local chief's feudal forces. The *Sardâr* asked the prince to stand on a high seat. The *Sardâr* then made a short speech: My dear villagers! *Mahârâj* Phân Kârâk's son stands before you. He is in great distress. He is our honourable guest. The prince's name is Kutungrây. We must show him our due respect. His younger brother Kucungray is missing. We must search him out. But remember one warning. You have heard the tragic information of the prince. If the king comes to know that the prince is alive here, then the royal police will come to arrest him for sacrifice. The king will order to massacre us also. So, you must not disclose the fact of his refuge. I will severely punish the discloser.

The assembled villagers assured to do the needful. They consoled and cheered up the prince and bowed their heads before the prince. The villagers retired for the night. The prince was happy to see the people's response. The *Sardâr* and his wife made arrangement for the sleep of the prince. They too took their bed and fell asleep while discussing about the distress of the prince.

The Bâchâl village headman, Khâ-Kalak, had a small family: husband, wife and a little daughter. The daughter's name was Matam. It was a prosperous peasant family. But the *Sardâr's* wife was a little unhappy; she had one desire left unfulfilled; she had no son. Now, having the prince within the family, the desire was largely fulfilled.

But on that very night, the distrought prince dreamed a bad dream; a nightmare accompanied with a cry of helplessness and horror haunted him. The scene of the funeral place, the memory of the wetnurse, the anxiety for the younger brother repeatedly appeared in his mind. The crisis & frustration experienced during the day affected the boy's mind; the sad memory vividly appeared in dream. The *Sardar* and his wife pacified him and

persuaded him to fall asleep again. No word was allowed to leak out.

To return to the younger brother. The little boy lay in bed & thought of his brother. On that night, lying in a soft bed, younger brother also cried; he was in a state of delirium. He had a bad dream; in the dream he muttered. His eyes were drowsy. Kulang *Sardâr* and his wife were seated by his bed-side. The *Sardâr's* right-hand man was Bagalâ. Bagalâ was his errand boy. The next morning Bagala came as usual. Through Bagala, the *Sardar* sent a message to the villagers for a meeting in the afternoon. Bagala arranged seats and offered them betel leaf, tobacco, etc. The prince was made to sit by the right side of the *Sardâr*. Then the *Sardâr* made a short speech: This charming child is the son of our *Mahârâj* Fân Kârâk. Force of cruel circumstances & ill luck, rather than deliberate choice, brought the prince from the luxury of the palace to the poor house of the subjects. He is our honourable guest. By the grace of god, he has been narrowly escaped. If the king comes to know that the prince is alive and is living here, it will not be possible to protect him. Our sufferings will be terribly endless. So, we must not disclose the news of the prince's refuge. You are to take an oath to this effect. I repeat: The king will kill him, if he can catch him. The king has many eyes & ears.

The villagers had their support & sympathy for the prince. They took the oath and left the place. Not even a word filtered out of the remote village to the distant capital. The villagers kept their words. The *Sardâr* was strict just to punish the evil-doers, & to praise the well-doers.

Kulang *Sardar's* financial condition was stable. Like their neighbours, they were shifting cultivators. The hill slope cultivation used to yield crops sufficient enough for normal consumption leaving a quantity as surplus. Kulang *Sardar*, a well-to-do peasant, had no anxiety in

familial matters. Within the house was congenial hospitality. By nature, the *Sardâr* was of amiable disposition. So, he was on friendly terms with the villagers. The friendly neighbours used to visit his house usually in the evening enjoying themselves in chewing betel leaf, smoking tobacco, singing and playing musical instruments. Devotional songs were their favourite items. The *Sardâr's* wife was an accomplished artist. It was a blissful combination of peace & prosperity.

The younger brother used to sit at a corner and to listen to the songs attentively. During the day time, he had an ample opportunity to practise and play on the musical instruments. The *Sardâr* observed the instinct of the prince. The *Sardâr* appreciated it and inspired the prince and imparted him training in music. The prince was quick to adopt & to learn the lessons. The *Sardâr* and Bagala were particularly happy to get the precocious prince.

Bagala had a daughter named Ninângti. She was a charming and smart girl. She was junior contemporary of the junior prince, Kucung. She too used to come to the house of the *Sardâr* along with her father. She too had natural instinct for music & fine arts. The training of Kucung and Ninangti went on in full swing. Within about a year or two, the duo displayed a marvellous sweet harmony of instrumental and vocal music. The villagers applauded them. They found genuine favour at the hands of the *Sardâr*. The favour and support of the villagers for the prince were something like worshipful esteem.

Again, to return to the Bachal *Sardâr*. The *Sardâr* sent Kepekchâ, & Châmlâ and a few others in search of the younger brother. The *Sardar* himself, accompanied by a few neighbours, set out in the morning. They made a meticulous search in & around the spot where the younger brother had been made to sit. Densely coated with jungle, the hills were the haunt of wild animals. Bears, leopards, tigers were frequent marauders. Nobody

could say definitely; he might have been devoured by tiger or bear. God forbid: May it not happen. In case of any accident at least the victim's dress, hair, bone, etc. would be found. But nothing of the sort was found. Disheartened & tired, Kha-Kalak *Sardar* and his retinue returned in the afternoon. The senior prince and the Bachal *Sardâr* were eagerly waiting for the news from Kepekchâ, & Châmlâ. After extensive & intensive search, they returned in the evening. They had not indeed heard anything of him. Nobody could furnish any information.

All the hopes of the senior prince were dashed to the ground. He broke out in weeping. For hours, he waited to hear the news. Then, observing that the searchers returned empty-handed, the senior prince became distraught. Kutung and Kucung were the two orphan princes, between whose ages there was a difference of only a few years. An endless varietry of sweet and sour memories appeared & passed through his memories. The memories of the illness of their mother, the promise given by the father, the motherly love of the wetnurse, the jealousy of the step-mother, the scene of the cremation ground, etc. recurred, to the mind of the prince. The memory of the kindness of the executioner, of the beckoning by a shadowy figure, of the shelter in a tree, etc. also appeared in his mind. They survived all those misfortunes. But alas! at the last moment the younger brother was missing! Kutungray wept for a long time. At last, the elder brother made an earnest appeal to their mother again: Mother! you had been kind enough in feeding & clothing and in providing us with all sorts of comforts. You protected us from all sorts of distress. Perhaps, even today, you are observing us. Kucungray is missing in the dense jungle. I do not know whether he is alive or not. Wheresoever he may be, protect your helpless son.

The Bachal *Sardâr* had only one daughter, named

Matam. Matam was junior contemporary of the senior prince, Kutung. The prince excited the admiration of the villagers by his active & energetic habits. He had many friends. He was a boy just after the hearts of the villagers. He naturally became the leader of those children. Over most of the countryside, except the capital city, Rângâmâti, the geographical condition was largely responsible for the difficulties & differences. The eastern part of Tripura, with its hillranges & deep jungle & wild animals, was an ideal place for fishing, hunting, gathering and shifting cultivation. Besides geographical differences, there were socio-political differences. In the hills life had a rhythm, an adventure, a spirit of fellow-feeling. In addition, here the prince had no fear of the jealousy of the step-mother & the machination of the diviner. So, it was a common scene in the Bachal *Sardâr* village to see a group of children running, walking, laughing, singing, playing, dancing in and around the village. They delighted in every form of exercise. And the prince with his mirthfulness & jollity, sportsmanship & frolicsomeness, used to keep his friends joyful. The children had a blissful time. They used to wander from hill to hill, playing their flutes. Sometimes, the prince would stand silently and stare sulkily at the forest and think about his brother. He had a few happy as well as unhappy memories to look back to.

Time flew, as it usually flies. Nearly a decade had already passed. The prince Kutung was now an adolescent young man. Above all, he was the son of a king. The other boys were no match for him in brightness & skill. He was equally healthy & handsome. He was so attractive! He gave striking proof of his ability in hunting. He could unerringly hit the target. He excited the admiration of the friends in his capacity of drinking a good quantity of country-liquor without getting intoxicated. A sign of manliness!

Formerly, every able-bodied young man of Tripura

had to undergo training in arms. They had to leave farm & field for the battle field. The king used to call them in the capital. Kalakray was such a veteran feudal soldier. Being summoned, by the king, he fought battles. He had in his command several feudal soldiers. Kalakray imparted necessary training to the prince also. The prince tenaciously undertook the training, and simultaneously inspired his friends to undergo the same training. Thus, a small band of feudal army was built up. From that time forward, he had in his mind a faint ambition of obtaining by conquest the throne of Tripura. It was a gleam of hope! Nevertheless, the subjects were trained in habits of implicit obedience & feudal service.

The Bachal *Sardâr*, Khâ-Kalak, had great love & affection for the senizor prince. The *Sardâr* was the blind supporter of the prince. Any thing done by the prince would find a support from the *Sardâr*. Taking advavtage of the indulgence of the powerful *Sardâr*, the wayward prince went out of the way. He lost the sense of proportion. That life of idle ease was going to be a torment to the villagers. He eloped privately with unmarried girls of the village. Fascinated by his healthy & handsome body, the girls had to respond to his entreatment. He had excuses to ensnare them. However, he loved Matam far better than any other girl. Sometime during the lazy hour of an afternoon, the self-willed prince & Matam would set out for a leisurely trip to a distant hill. The duo would remain closeted together till early evening; sometime out of rapturous delight, he would assure Matam to make her the queen of Tripura. To a rural village headman's daughter like Matam, the splendour and magnificence of the palace were beyond the range of imagination. She would ask him to explain to her. The twilight of imagination carried her far & far away. Her heart leaped up in ecstasy. The Bachal *Sardâr* and his wife expected the senior prince to marry Matam. They expected him to be their son-in-law, because the duo were near & dear

to each other. The duo loved each other. To call a prince *Mahârâj* is pleasing; it enhances his prestige. Matam would secretly call the prince *Mahârâj*. He would feel buoyant.

The junior prince Kucungray was about to attain the age of puberty. Bagala's daughter Ninangti was nearly of the same age. The duo loved each other. They were near & dear to each other. The junior prince was very fond of song & music, quite as fond as Ninangti was. Kucung used to play on an instrument called *Changpreng*, while Ninangti used to slip round to Kucung's side with another instrument called *Dângdul*. For a few moments of ecstasy and hilarity, they would lose the consciousness of their physical existence. Kucung was gifted with a poetic instinct. He could spontaneously compose song, and the songs would be wedded to music. The songs were melodious, harmonious, hilarious and touching. The listeners would be moved & excited. Kucung knew it, and he felt the impulse himself more than once. The episodes of his childhood days were vivid in his memories: the illness of his mother, the last days of his mother, the promise of his father, the breach of trust by the father & the second marriage, the jealousy of the step-mother, the mother's illness, the diviner's prescription, the royal order to execute the two brothers, invocation, the kindness of the wetnurse and the executioner. He pitched them together into a pathetic, narrative epic. The emotions, awakened by the song, were actual emotions in the real life of the princes.

The younger prince was unparalleled; he had shown extraordinary capacity in song and music. His artistic skill commanded a large audience from the neigbouring villages also. Slowly and slowly, even the distant villages started inviting the prince. But the prince was unwilling to go there without Ninangti. The poetic impulse came from her. The duo were complementary to each other. The song and music and dance are also complementary

to each other. There was a delicate difficulty in taking Ninangti to the distant villages. Bagala knew more about the village folks than the young prince did. Ninangti was a *Chikli*, an unmarried girl. Her parents were reluctant to alllow Ninangti to accompany the prince in a journey to the distant villages. They should not send Ninangti on such an errand. The only way out was to arrange a marriage. And why not? There was a spontaneous friendship between the prince and Ninangti. The prince was only a few years older; she could do all sorts of domestic jobs that he could not. She could sing, dance and play on a musical instrument (*Dângdul*) beautifully. Kulang *Sardar's* wife Tuinangti broke the ice; she made a proposal to Bagala. Bagala & his wife became very happy; to them it was an unexpected gain. The difference was as wide as that between heaven & hell; they readily agreed and formally approached Kulang *Sardâr*. The *Sardâr* approved the proposal. The guardians came to a consensus of opinion to arrange the marriage during the ensuring month of *Falgun* (February- March). The decision was made public, and preparation went on. Altogether, it was a very pleasant decision. It left the duo a good deal to think of what one could do to make another feel happy. It would be better to sing and to play on musical instruments alternately as a sort of recipe for happiness in life. They hoped to fill in their conjugal life with the ripples of song.

With the aid & advice of the village council, the sprightly youths of the village made all necessary arrangements for the marriage. The marriage ceremony was scheduled to be held during the first half of *Fâlgun*. The Tripuri people believed that by examining the entrails, the heart, the lungs and the liver of an animal or a bird that had been offered in sacrifice, the *Akcâi* (= priest) could predict the divine desire about the future of a couple or of a person for whom the sacrifice had been made. Accordingly, in this case also, a hen was a

sacrificed and the priest predicted a bright future. The marriage was duly solemnised with great eclat, enthusiasm and spree. Tuinangti was happy to get Ninangti as her daughter-in-law. The villagers too were happy. Things came down to normalcy after a few days.

The younger prince had ceased weeping long ago; the wise prince wanted to live and not to suffer. He wanted to live pleasantly and in a princely style. How? He was cherishing a few plans. The immediate plan was to constitute a team of performers of song and music. Now, after the solemnisation of marriage, the younger prince found himself in a comfortable position; the plan within his mind had struggled to get a definite shape. Not wasting a moment with unimportant things, one day he sought the aid & advice of Kulang *Sardar*. Cheerful enough, the *Sardar* readily gave his consent and convened a meeting of the villagers in the afternoon. The villagers were glad enough to bless the proposal . A team was formed with the *Sardar*, Bagala, Kucungray, Ninangti, and a few artists in the committee. The *Sardar* and Bagala undertook to look after the management, while the younger prince undertook to train his young colleagues up.

Another important motive was to search out his elder brother in course of the performance in the villages. The reminiscenes of their childhood days would certainly evoke response from the elder brother. And an additional aim was to entertain the people with the pathos. The people loved his songs, because in those songs the profoundest interests of life were pathetically and directly presented. His songs used to touch the tender emotion of the listeners. With tearful eyes, they would eagerly listen more & more.

His plan had one cultural aspect: it was to generate an atmosphere favourable to fine arts, to enrich the people's life with an additional dose of songs.

Initially the team responded to the invitations from

the near-by villages. The managers of the team allotted one night's performance to each village. But the listeners were so delighted with the performance that they eagerly & lovingly compelled the managers to spare the time for another night. So, the next night the team continued the performance, and with the same result, the team had to continue it. Even then, the listeners were not fully satisfied. So, the managers had to give the unsatisfied villagers a false assurance and to fall back, and to respond to the invitation of another village. Thus they visited from village to village.

The songs being thus performed, when the adjacent villages were attended to, the team started to set out for the distant villages. It created a stir. The ripples of the song went on getting expanded. It became very popular, and the news was in the air. The villagers of the Bachal *Sardâr* heard the good news. They became impatient to invite the team. Following their customary decency & decorum, the villagers approached the headman, Khâ-Kalak, to do the needful. The headman's daughter, Matam, and the servant, Chamla, put internal pressure upon the headman. So the headman granted their request. The headman next day sent Chamla, Kepekcha and Chaduray to invite the team.

The Bâchâl *Sardâr*'s representatives convinced the managers of the team. The date was fixed. The Bâchâl *Sardâr* made arrangement for the comfortable rest of the guests. Again with the aid & advice of the village council, the sprightly youths collected vegetables and banana leaves from the jungle. The senior prince, Kutungray, hunted a deer for the guests. All the villagers were in jubilant mood. True to their words, the managers along with the team journeyed a long distance and reached the Bâchâl village in time. They were given a hearty welcome by the hosts.

It was a full moon night. The glittering beam of moonlight thrilled the people. A pair of lapwing bird (=

Hot ti ti) were flying above in a joyous mood; their loud & lustful note added to the romantic & breezy atmosphere. A few pairs of Titmouse (= *Châmchikâ*) came out of the house rafters and started hovering from this house-rafter to that house-rafter. The cheerful villagers thronged in large number. The courtyard was brimful. The open & spacious verandah of the *Sardâr's* one-storeyed bamboo-hut was decorated to be used as stage by the artists.

The band came to the stage. The audience applauded them. The small band of musicians played their musical instruments; the sound was exciting, harmonious, lyrical & melodious. Then, the repeater sang the first couplet:

Oh! my dear countrymen!
Attentively hear the tragic story of the Tripura palace
Which has an outward glace.
Now the prince sang:
Oh! my dear countrymen!
Attentively hear the tragic story of the Tripura palace
Which has an outward glace.
We, the two princes, spent childhood in mood green
Poverty and distress we have not seen.
Our mother used to offer us tasty food
With a glass of water by our side she stood.
One day she was not feeling well
Physicians were called in wheresoever they dwell.
In her death-bed, father took an oath
not to marry again, to protect us both.

He broke his promise and married again
that resulted in our severe pain.
Our dear mother is now dead
the step-mother is enthroned in her stead.
we suffered a sea-change
Into something sad and strange.

The jealous step-mother pretended to be sick

Her lover in the guise of a diviner big
Prescibed son's blood-bath as the remedy
King ordered the executioner to get ready.
There stood many mourners all around
We, the two brothers, were taken to the cremation ground.

We sought time and invoked the mother's boon
Surprisingly hailstorm, lightning came soon
There occurred heavy shower, terrible sound
Black, hot smoke engulfed the ground
The wetnurse, the executioner left us in forest deep
we spent the night in a tree without sleep.

Next morning we ran towards forests & hills
Full of wild animals and a few rills.
To quench my thirst, my brother went for water
In the labyrinth he lost his path somewhere.
As I went down the trail side
two hillmen came to be my guide.

The repeater replayed the first couplet
The band of musician repeated the instrumental music.
Next, Ninangti took up the chord & sang

Oh! elder brother, my dear elder brother
For water thou art wandering here & there.
Leaving me alone in forest deep
Thou art moving up & down the hill steep.
I am weary weeping & weeping here
Thou art wandering solitary somewhere.

The prince made the last appeal :

I wish I were where my brother lies
Day & night in the shade of a tree he cries.
Give me my brother's address
Where he is living in distress.

In love & gratitude, before you I kneel
Farewell, my countrymen, farewell.

Overcome with pathos & sympathy, the audience were shedding tears profusely. The senior prince had been so long sitting admist the audience. Overcome with grief, he cast his head down between the two knees; occasionally, he was found wagging his head up & down & staring. He was deeply thinking about his younger brother. In many respects, the main singer resembled his younger brother. The main artist seemed to be known to him. He might have seen him somewhere. If he were alive, he would be of the same age as the artist was. The function was completed; it left no doubt in his mind about the real identity of the main artist, for whom he was waiting for. So, the senior prince could not wait for a moment; he rushed and climbed up the stairs and cried out: I am your brother, I am your brother! The brothers accosted and hugged each other. The audience had at last a pleasant composure to see the scene of reunion. It provided a great relief to the veteran headmen. Thus, the function ended in a happy comedy.

The newly formed team found spontaneous support at the hands of the hillmen; the villagers applauded them; and the youths were thinking of imitating them. Yet, the stir did not reach Rangamti, the capital of Tripura. So, the two brothers were safe in the homely atmosphere & hospitality of the hillmen. They touched the heart of the hillmen and caught the romance of the hills and rivers of the eastern part of Tripura. In this region the land was desolate & wild, only a few scattered villages on hill-tops lying among the hills & jungles. The region became a safe resort to the princes. Life remained in the Tripura hills much as it did several centuries ago.

Nevertheless, Matam & Ninangti became friendly to each other. They remained for some time, lost in admiration of each other. They remained engrossed in friendly conversation. The emotional outburst disclosed

the information of marriage between Ninangti & the junior prince, Kucung. They smiled. Ninangti remarked: Matam! you are worthy of the prince. I shall try to arrange the marriage as early as possible

Meanwhile, Kha-Kalak *Sardâr*, Kulang *Sardâr* and Bagala were in a very happy mood. Chamla offered them wine and meat.

The junior prince and Ninangti were counting every hour as it passed; they rose before day-break and awakened Kulang *Sardar* & Bagala, pressing them to approve the proposal of marriage between Matam and the senior prince. They readily approved the proposal. So, the junior prince, Kucung, formally placed the proposal before Kha-Kalak *Sardâr*. Kha-Kalak *Sardâr* gave a long look and smiled. In presence of Kulang *Sardâr* & Bagala then & there Kha-Kalak *Sardâr* consented to the proposal gladly. During the last week of *Fâlgoon*, the marriage ceremony was duly solemnised; and the villagers were entertained with a feast & festivity.

There was a general air of happiness, which was only natural after the bustle of the first few days of the function and the reunion and the marriage. One day on a March evening, the two brothers were discussing the degree of seriousness of the crisis of their childhood days. Their early memories went back to the cheerless days of orphanage.Then the elder brother, Kutung said :Brother! let us now turn to the present situation. After a long time, we have been reunited. We do not yet know the condition of the cunning step-mother. We do not yet know whether the step-mother has given birth to any child. It matters little. We are the elderly children of our father. The throne of Tripura must discend, as a rule, from the father to his first-born son. Why should we forego the legal claim? After the demise of the father, we should succeed to the throne. If he declines, we shall resort to force. We shall not excuse the jealous step-mother who blackmailed the father into sacrificing us for the cure of

her false disease.

The younger brother Kutung, supported the proposal. Kutung said: We should not insult our father publicly or privately. We should argue with him directly. We should not disclose our identity initially. We should go to the capital in the guise of a team of singers and musicians and dancers. We should try to avoid any attempt at rebellion or regicide. We shall dissemble our motive, and diguise our identity. Our melodrama, our folk song, folk dance and our folk music will attract a large & distinguished gathering, and will leave an impression upon the minds of the audience. The displicable incidents will be interspersed. The presentation has to be a balanced & harmonious one; it will act like a mirror; it will make the king hear the story of the misdeeds & mistakes of the royal family. The king will look back; he will be pensive; he will be engaged in deep thought. He will repent. Introspection will set the ball rolling.

The two brothers discussed about the proposal with their local guardians and friends. They all appreciated the idea and assured to provide necessary assistance. So, one day in the morning they set out. Kha-Kalak *Sardâr*, Kulang *Sardâr*, Bagala, Chamla, Matam, Ninangti; the two brothers, and a few young artists were in the team. It was a long & tedious journey through hills & dales. After a few days of wearisome travelling, they reached near the capital and took rest in the house of a distant relative.It was neither easy nor legal to arrange a function in the capital without the permission of the king and co-operation of the royal administration. So, the two aged headmen, Kha-Kalak *Sardar* and Kulang *Sardar*, went to meet one influential minister, Kâcâkray Chaudhuri; on reaching the residence of the minister, the two headmen duly informed the minister the intention & the news of the arrival of a team of singers and musicians and dancers. The intelligent minister went into the palace, and convinced the king and returned with permission.

The minister was quick to convey the news to the headmen. The minister arranged to decorate the conference-hall of the palace for the performance.

The next day the performance was started. The confernce-hall was house-full. The ministers, the nobles, the ladies and the servants sat at different chairs & corner according to their rank and dignity. The artists had already entered the stage. Amidst the sounds of flute, tom tom & other musical instruments, the magnificently robed *Mahârâjâ* entered the hall and sat in the special seat. All the audience stood up to pay homage to the king. After several years, the princes eagerly saw their father again; with great difficulty they controlled their emotions and tears.

The band remained ready in the stage. The audience applauded them. There was something to amuse everybody, from singing and music to dancing. The musicians played their musical instruments; the sound was exciting, harmonious, lyrical and melodious. Then, the repeater sang the first couplet:

Oh! my dear country men!
Attentively hear the story of theTripuri dynasty
Which has a long and glorious history.

Now, the main artist started the song:
Oh! my dear country men!
Attentively hear the story of theTripuri dynasty
Which has a long and glorious history.
This dynasty belong to the Lunar dynasty of fame
Its historic deeds remain in a living frame.
It had several kings brave and bold
They fought many battles in the days old.

The youths crossed wilderness to wander
They rushed and followed the commander.
They boldly participated in many a fight
Their wounds bled day and night.

There were kings great and good
Who ruled the kingdom in a just mood.

The band interrupted with an instrumental music. The king was inpressed with the good looks & dignity of manner of the main artists; he became curious to know the identity of the two bright and beautiful artists; the king silently directed the minister to make necessary inquiry tactfully.

The repeater relayed the first couplet.
The main artist resumed the song:
Oh my dear countrymen!
Attentively hear the story of the king alive
Whose devoted queen no longer thrive.
The queen died young and fair
Leaving his sons to his care.
The king took an oath now broken
The queen's last appeal now forgotten.

The first queen is now dead
The second queen is enthroned in her stead.
The new queen had no affection but pretension
Only cunning deception was her contention.
The sons suffered a sea-change
Into something sad & strange.

The jealous queen pretended to be sick
A stranger in the guise of a diviner big
Prescibed son's blood-bath as the remedy
King ordered the executioner to get ready.
In presence of many sympathisers all around
The two sons were taken to the cremation ground.
They sought time and invoked the mother's boon
Surprisingly hailstorm, lightning came soon.
There occurred heavy shower, terrible sound.
Black, hot smoke engulfed the ground

The wetnurse, the executioner left them in forest deep
They spent the night in a tree without sleep.

The band interrupted with a instrumental music. Most of the audience were weeping. Recollecting his mistakes, even the king became repentant. Everybody was speechless. What a grave mistake!

Next, Ninangti took up the chord and sang:

Oh! my dear countrymen!
Attentively hear the story of the Tripuri dynasty
which has a history nice as well as nasty.
It was a night dark and terrible
It was a nymph to protect them from death horrible.
Next morning they ran towards forests & hills
Full of wild animals and a few rills

To quench the junior's thirst, the senior went for water
In the labyrinth the senior lost his path somewhere.
The separated brothers moved oppositely helter-skelter.
Some unkown hillmen offered them shelter.
Wrapt in cloud of sorrow & in unceasing pain
They are eager to meet their father again.

The mighty crescendo of words of pathos matched with the climax of hysteria in the king's mind. The climax came when the king wallowed on the floor and wept like a child. He wept on account of his mistake, on account of his cruelty. With a deep groan, he flung himself on the floor. Beating his own forehead, he hissed a word: My son! A spasm racked him. He was in a fit. The king was immediately carried to his bed-chamber for rest and sleep.

The faithful wet-nurse was now old enough; she could not walk more than thirty or forty feet from her doorstep. She was left all alone with her memories. Her eyesight became weak. However, she, like others, came

to enjoy the function. She squatted in a corner of the conference-hall. She attentively and tearfully listened to the song. After a while, a doubt arose in her mind about the identity of the two bright artists. She stared at them repeatedly. She correctly identified them. Pleasant moments again occurred. She did not disclose it. She was observing the situation.

After sometime, the king grew quiet; he ceased weeping. He was recovering from the quagmire of *moha*, delusion, illusion, obfuscation, self-forgetfulness, henpeck & lustfulness, into the conciousness of self-assertion, statesmanship, dynamism and fatherly duty. The chief minister and the army chief were moving quickly up & down. The servants were bobbing. At the direction of the king, the chief of the army invited the two main artists. The two artists stood before the king with folded hands and bowed their heads before the king. The king greated & appreciated them and then asked: Are my son, Kutung & Kucung, alive? After listening to your songs, it seems to me that they are still alive. Tell me, where are they? whatever you demand, I shall give & honour you. What a fool am I ? Without thinking the pros & cons, I gave them capital punishment. Their mother miraculously saved them. I shall bring them back at any cost. I shall atone. As I listened, I realized my folly; and I am ready to amend.

Observing the king's distressful state of mind, his appreciative, sympathetic and repentable approach, the two artists made the submission: *Mahârâj!* your two sons are alive. If you solemnly undertake an oath and do accordingly,
then and then only they may come here to meet you.

The king replied: I shall certainly undertake the oath and act accordingly. Tell me the condition, tell me the terms of the oath.

Kucung said: *Mahârâj!* there is a big wooden box in the chamber of the *Mahârâni.* Will you kindly take steps

to open the box in presence of the security staff? This is the oath. This is the condition. Nothing else!

The king said: Only this much! only to open a box? Is it a difficult task? The trouble of it is not at all great.

Yes, I shall do it now & immediately. The king swore an ardent oath of faithfulness and summoned the ministers and the chief of the army and the security staff. The army chief deployed his staff all around the house of the queen. Then the king, accompanied by the ministers, the nobles and the army chief, proceeded towards the inner apartments of the palace.

The two artists were sitting quietly. Meanwhile, an old woman (*Dhai-mâ*) made her way through an anxious crowd and trudged limpingly towards the artists. Tears were rolling down her wrinkled face. Like a loving mother, she hugged the two artists and caressed them. The two artists correctly identified the woman. They too hugged her out of an emotional outburst. The spectors were making guess and conjecture about the two artists. But neither the old woman nor the two artists openly disclosed the identity of the artists. The old woman soon left the room and retired to her apartment. The two artists were waiting in the same room.

The queen did not come to the conference-hall to enjoy the function of song & music. She was sadder than ever when her waitress reported about the programme. She surmised something evil. She kept herself inside her room with doors and windows closed. She, at the tragic crisis of her life, attempted to protect herself by falsehood and deception, as she had done earlier. She stashed Phatikray inside the big box and kept it under lock & key. She carefully kept the key with herself; the key was tied to a corner of her clothe and stashed inside the waist-clothe. Now, she pretended to be deeply engaged in weaving.

The king, while marching struttingly towards the room of the queen, thought that the box must be

interesting and illuminating. For the first time, the king became curious about the mystery of the box. The suggestion of the two artists must be meaningful & significant. The king, forcing his way into the bed-chamber of the queen, asked : Where is the key of this wooden box? That was a hard question to answer. Her evil genius and instinct prompted her not to surrender readily. She said : *Mahârâj!* I will not hand over the key. It contains my personal and valuable things. My father gave it. I shall not allow anybody to touch it. So long as I am alive, I will not allow anybody to open it.

As her resistance became stubborn, the king's doubt inflamed. The king directed the minister and the army chief to engage the servants & soldiers to twitch, to drag the box and to pull it outside. Immediately, the queen rushed, held out her arm and gripped the box.

The queen thus shielded herself under the custom of etiquette. Not only the servants, the soldiers, even the minister and the army-chief were to maintain a safe distance from the body of the queen. To overcome the mean stratagem, the king boldly said: I am not interested in what you thing sacred. Let me tell you once & for all, I am interested in what I desire.

Having said those words, soon the king angrily caught her with his own arms and twitched her away. She was sobbing, panting and weeping and beating her forehead. She tried her best too get out of the grip. Nobody dared to rescue her, to comfort her. The *Mahârâj* was now extremely excited and angry. Who would stand before his fury! Neither a minister nor a waitress dared approach. They backed out of the chamber.

Phatikray was inside the big box; he was almost paralysed with horror; he was straining his ear to hear the angry words of the king, and hurry-skurry of the queen. He became alarmed and his hair rose. He was trembling. Amid a scene of horrible confusion & suspense, the heavy box was lifted & shifted to the conference-

hall. The two artists instantaneously recognised the box. Herein lay many mysteries. The mystery was to be dispelled soon. And soon the whole assemblage thronged around the box. They were whispering and staring. Suddenly, the king rashly came and stood among them. For a few seconds, those who crowded round him became respectfully speechless. The king at once orderd to break the lock in presence of all. The security officers broke the lock and opened the lid. There they found a healthy young man: a horror-stricken youth still clad in his night-dress. An awful discovery!

The tired king was taking rest at a little distance. The king asked the minister: What have you seen inside? The minister replied: *Dharmâvatâr!* kindly pardon my audacity; Be kind enough to see the awful discovery. Soon the king came forward and saw the criminal and immediately shouted out: Who are you? Who did stash you here? How did you enter inside the box? At the order of the king, the security officers caught him tightly and pulled him out of the box. The minister and the army-chief asked question after question. But the criminal made no reply; he stood like statue. At the order of the angry king, Kalakray started whipping. After a good deal of thrashing, he made the confession: My name is Phatikray. I am a resident of the village of Nikra *Sardâr*. I have come here along with the dowry of the queen. At the time I was stashed inside the box. The king's servants carried the box and placed inside the bed-chamber of the queen.

Hearing the confessions, the king orderd to beat him more forcefully. Kalakray whipped with all force. The criminal lay unconscious. After sometime he regained his consciousness. The king again asked: Who did come in the guise of a diviner?

The criminal admitted: I came. I prescribed the sacrifice of the two princes as a remedy of the mock disease. The queen had no disease. It was a devilish plot for profligacy.

Thr criminal thus confessed the crime. The queen and the criminal helped each other and encouraged each other in the sinister design. The plot was cunningly executed. So, the criminal was dragged violently into the middle of the conference-hall. At the order of the king, salt was applied to his wounds; and then he was kicked, heckled & jostled to death by the assemblage. The king quickly went out of the hall.

In an agony of grief and repentance, the king immediately left the hall and threw himself on the empty bed, moaning : motherless sons! what tormented the king most was the deception, the lie that the queen was not simply ill, but she was dying. The ministers and the army officers accepted the lie! It was all through the queen that the king got into serious troubles. She betrayed the king. How great a shame she put on the face of the king!

The king summoned the minister. The king said: I was rather reluctant to marry for the second time. You made all sorts of arrangements for this marriage. You did not make thorough investigation about the bride & her family. As a result, all these disasters and defamation happened. Now, I cannot show my face. I have been grossly misguided. The voluptuous queen blackmailed us and made a mockery of fatal disase only to kill the two boys. By such a wicked device, she attempted to kill the sons. I have also committed a major mistake; I ordered to execute the sons. The lustful game, carried on for a considerable period, was not fated to continue smoothly, for the two sons survived the heinous attempt on their life. By the blessings of their mother, they are alive and the plot has come to be known; otherwise the duo would continue. So, suggest me the nature & type of punishment she deserves for the gravest infidelity!

Meanwhile, the waitress of the notorious queen rushed to the king and said: *Maharaj!* please come sharp! it is likely that the queen-mother has swallowed poison. The queen-mother is dying: The queen-mother is dying!

The disgusted king at once wrathfully & disparagingly said: She should have deid earlier. Let her die. I do not like to see her face.

Such was her dramatic fall from a prestigious position.

A nemesis! A rogue bites the hand that feeds him or her, and spoils the plate after eating.

Those were the hectic moments of tumultuous incidents. The king became utterly depressed & disheartened. The minister and the army-chief were there to comfort the king. Meanwhile, the faithful *Dhai-mâ* trudged limpingly towards the door of the king's bed-chamber. They became silent and stared at her. In the midst of all din & bustle, the wet-nurse seemed to have a smile implicitly signifying something known to her only. She said: *Mahârâj!* the bad impact of *Rahu* & *Ketu* on your fate is gone today. Fate willed it. Henceforth, your good days are coming. The criminals got due punishment. They perished on account of their sins. They deserved it. By the grace of god, the princes are alive. This is a matter of great consolation.

The disillusioned king was waiting with bated breathe the home-coming of the sons. The king emotionally said: Mailuma! I shall never be able to repay your debt. Only your wit & wisdom saved the sons. You go and get the whereabouts of the sons from the artists. My mind is anxious, I am eager to see them; without them my life is a burden.

Mailuma left the king's chamber and returned immediately along with the two main artists. The king cut short the conversation with the minister. She was now ready to give the surprise. Resting her hands on the shoulders of the two young artists, the old wet-nurse confidently said: *Mahârâj!* these two artists are your sons: Kumar Kutung & Kumar Kucung: hold out your arms to take them into your bosom. The king, in great thrill, stood up and hugged the sons. The sons bowed down. The father

and the sons were weeping out of joy. The tears were pleasing, life-giving like the old memory.

The other members of the team were waiting outside. At the wink of the wet-nurse, Matam & Ninangti came in & bowed down. The wet-nurse gave the introduction. After that, the two headmen and other members came in and bowed down. Matam & Ninangti gave the introduction.

With the permission of the king, the army-chief made necessary arrangement for the cremation of the two dead bodies. Kalakray supervised the funeral rite.

The situation in the capital was suddenly and positively changed from the next day. There emerged a rosy atmosphere. There was a general air of happiness, which was only natural after the removal of the evil forces, and the reunion. In the presence of the sons and the daughters-in-law, the king felt an inward peace. Shaking off the despondency, the king again set his mind to administration.

The wet-nurse had in her heart a very tender love for the two orphan boys. She won the affection of all for her devotion & duty, for her common sense & courage. But she would, on no account, accept money for her motherly service. For that act of kindness, the king was ready to give any amount of gift. She felt amply rewarded when the king had expressed his deep sense of solemn gratitude. Kutung, Kucung, Matam & Ninangti used to respect her and take advice from her in domestic matters. Henceforth she was given the supervisory duty over all the domestic servants.

The king and the *Sardârs* sat for a long while talking of their experiences. The *Sardârs* talked of how the two princes were found in the deep forest, how they were nursed and consoled, how the villagers responded to their songs & music. The king appreciated their service and amply rewarded them with adequate provisions in the capital.

Time was passing & rushing onward like a stream.

The king was growing steadily weaker. Circumstances were altering. Matam and Ninangti were making efforts to make the home delightful and domestic garden beautiful. The two sons were assisting the father in administering the kingdom. A few years passed under the changed circumstances. The old king found himself utterly unable any longer to bear the burden of administration. He lost attachment to life. So, he was now thinking of getting rid of the responsibility. Usually, the throne was to descend from the father to the eldest prince; under certain cricumstances & considerations like character & wisdom, the eldest son could be passed over in favour of a younger. However, here the king had a mind to install the elder son. In consultation with the minister & the army-chief and the members of the royal family, the king had his decision confirmed. On an auspicious day, the elder son was duly and ceremonially coronated. The new king appointed his younger brother minister.

The new king and the new minister had many friends in the hills. They knew the condition of the countryside. They took steps for the safety & security of the subjects. After a few years, the old king happily breathed his last. The sons and relatives performed the funeral rites with all devotion and grandeur.

15. The White Elephant

In a certain village lived a peasant with his wife and a son. The peasant fell ill and died leaving the wife and the son helpless. The widow thought: it was honourable to earn by hard labour than to beg. She had to go out daily to do household chores in the houses of the neighbours for a nominal salary in kind and food. Thus, she nursed and brought up the only child. The boy came of hardy peasant stock from the uplands of Tripura.

The boy had capacious intelligence, courage and earnestness. By the sheer force of intelligence and

industriousness, the brisk boy won the affection and admiration of the people. His name and fame came to the notice of the king. The king appointed him in the household service of the palace. Here he had to do a variety of work : cooking, sweeping, cleaning, fetching water, cutting firewood, weeding, making road, repairing houses, etc. In every work, he was efficient and ahead of others. He excelled at all indoor and outdoor duties.

The qualities of the boy attracted the attention of the king further. The king had a daughter. The royal family observed him from close quarters and decided to choose him as son-in-law. But the king was *Râkshash.*

The mystery was unknown to many people. He would behave like a goodman during day time, but at dead of night he would get up very quietly and devour animals and birds. It was a strange paradox.

It was a common practice in those days to set traps in the hills & jungles for catching wild animals and birds. Some of the royal servants were experts in setting traps. The traps were usually set in the evening and taken back in the following morning. One day the boy was sent for inspection. Having visited the trap, the boy reported that a young man had been caught in the trap. The king denied it as an illusion; he gave the boy a special shirt to wear. He wore it and revisited the trap and found a big black deer in the trap. Soon, the king's servants enthusiastically rushed there and brought the deer.

A feast was arranged. Friends & relatives were invited. They all sat to relish the meat. But the boy became suspicious; he did not eat the meat. He concealed the meat and dropped the meat below through the crevice of the platform. The domestic dogs and swines ate the meat.

From the sound of scratching & screaming by the animals below, the cunning king guessed that something wrong had occurred. On inquiry he ascertained that the boy, instead of eating, dropped the meat. The king said:

My dear boy, you are hungry; I like to offer you fish. Please come with me.

The king led him to a dark room. The boy found there many prisoners herded together in filth & foul air. They appealed to him to get out of the jail. The king kicked them; they turned into big fishes.

This incident confirmed the magic and mischief of the king. The boy's mind became restless: how could he arrange to get out of the clutch of the mysterious king? With worry and anxiety and the mother far away, the boy prayed for leave of absence. The king magically inserted an amulet inside the boy's forehead and said: This amulet will guard you against disease & death, go home, see your mother, come back here and get ready for marriage with my princess.

The horror of the boy was beyond words; to get out of the palace was a dream, a passion. To-day the boy is free. It was a significant moment. He had to quit the palace precipitately. He turned his steps homewards. He made long strides. The mother used to sit down daily for a few minutes watching the path along which her son would come. The boy reached home and narrated the incidents. The boy refused to be reconciled to the king. The mother consented. After a few days of rest and discussion, they decided to emigrate to the kingdom of another king for safety and security.

Accordingly, on the pretext of pilgrimage for the last rite of the deceased father, the boy with his mother left the native place; they travelled, travelled for days together.

The journey was very tedious for the fugitives. They found a vast expanse of jungles and a lake. They made a hut there. They made their living by collecting wild vegetables and selling firewood.

The promising boy was sure to shine in life. Soon he became prosperous and his mother arranged his marriage with a poor but obedient girl. The mother was

happy to see grandchildren, domestic animals and birds and relatives. Within a few decades the vast expanse of the forest was developed into a prosperous village. Now the family was in high spirits.

The news of the death of that magician king reached here. The octogenarian mother of the boy also died in due course. The boy is now an aged man; he has children and grandchildren. His life is now a burden to himself. He sincerely likes to die; but because of the amulet life was prolonging unusually. One day he arranged a big feast and entertained the villagers. After the feast, in the afternoon he narrated the story of his life. The moment the narration had been complete, the amulet came out and he along with his kinsmen died suddenly. Not a single member of his clan survived.

At the outskirt of that village lived a family of a different clan. That family did not participate in the feast. The family survived. The family consisted of a young couple. The husband used to go out in the morning for shifting cultivation. The wife was pregnant; she used to spend her time in spinning and weaving. The traditional hut of the family was on a raised platform supported by several poles & sticks. Below the platform there were apartments for cow and swine. In one such apartment lived a pregnant cow.

The housewife usually used to sit on her loom in the afternoon. Spinning & weaving kept her busy. She was indeed struggling along with the weaving of clothes for the coming baby. Because of her physical conditions, she could not move freely. The spindle in her hand would slip and fall below the platform. The cow was kind enough to collect the spindle. But it fell daily. The cow became disgusted and set a condition: We are going to be mothers. If you assure to arrange a marriage between the two children, I can take the trouble of collecting & restoring the spindle.
She had to agree.

In course of time, she gave birth to a daughter; while a bull calf was born to the cow. The girl and the bull became friends; they would play, dance and move together. The housewife kept her words and made a simple ceremony of marriage. It was a child marriage. After about a decade, the girl became very self-conscious. All sorts of strange rumours and remarks were now flying about the village regarding the unusual marriage. Now, she was in dilemma; she could not reconcile to a union that had been forced upon her. Being terribly shocked, she committed suicide by hanging in a myrobalan tree. With a heavy heart, the bull too dashed his head against the tree again and again and died there. The souls of the couple were turned into two beautiful myrobalan fruits.

One day the king made a pleasure trip into the forest for hunting deer. The king and his attendants took rest in the shade of the myrobalan tree. They saw the two big fruits. The king directed to pick up the fruits. While collecting the fruits from the lofty branches, one fruit slipped, and the king's elephant ate it. The other fruit was cautiously gathered and handed over to the king. The queen had no son or daughter. The queen ate the fruit. In course of time, the queen gave birth to a daughter, and the elephant gave birth to a white male calf. They became friends. Again, all sorts of strange rumours and remarks were flying in the capital regarding the unusual friendship.

Unable to tolerate the comments, one night the two friends eloped. They were too clever to enter any village or hamlet where their presence would be reported immediately. They had to quit the capital and human settlement quickly. They made long strides and took refuge in the deep forest of the eastern hills of Tripura. Though the police of the whole kingdom was warned; though in every market and village drum-beating was made to inform the people, days and even months passed

without any hope & trace. The entire kingdom worried of the princess. On the royal family lay the sad stain.

At last from the countryside came two young brothers: Bhutuâ and Rângiâ; they displayed their masculinity and assured to rescue the princess. They were slovenly, unclean and without any dignity. The guards brought the two brothers to the capital. What a heaven-sent opportunity! The king became happy and ordered to make arrangement for their rest and food in the royal guest-house. After two days, they were brought to the royal court. The two brothers were very glad to play homage to the king. The king asked their names and address. The two brothers expressed their confidence to take the venture and sought food & shelter for six months. After the preliminary introduction, the two brothers were directed to retire to the guest-house again.

The king and the ministers discussed the problem and the proposal. They agreed to give the two brothers a chance. It was decided that a team of guards and attendants would accompany them with food and other provisions.

On an auspicious day they set out amid much hope and excitement. The elder brother, Bhutua, was robust but dull. The younger brother, Rângiâ, was slim but intelligent; moreover, he was foot-print expert. Identifying the foot-prints of the white elephant, right from the capital, Rângiâ concentrated his attention on the path; he moved eastward. They travelled, travelled for months with daily haltage. At last, they reached a place named Nânâ-gomati Doâpâthar (नाना गोमती दोआपाथर). The royal guard & attendants made a hut and stored food and turned their steps capitalward.

It was Bhutua's duty to cook, to fetch water, to collect leaves and vegetables and to keep the house in order. It was Rângiâ's duty to watch and observe, to search and face any difficult situation. Rângiâ had no definite

routine; he used to go out at any time. Rangia told Bhutua: 'If any body asks: who are there inside? you should reply: Rângiâ and Bhutua are inside.'

One night during the absence of Rângiâ, one female demon came and asked: Who are inside? Bhutua replied: Rangia & Bhutua are inside. Hearing the reply, the female demon fled. The female demon visited every night, asked the same question, got the same reply and fled. It continued for about a week. One night Bhutua, out of ego & foolishness, replied: Bhutua and Rangia are inside. At once, the female demon forced her entry, strangulated Bhutua and cut his tongue and decamped, and descended down to her dwelling in the inferno.

Meanwhile, Rangia was out of the cottage for about a week. In the relentless search, he saw a great lake full of lotuses. There he came to see the white elephant bathing and sporting. The moment they exchanged their eyes, a spasm of pain shook them and silenced them for a space, but later they went on fighting and fighting for seven days and seven nights. The scene was terrible. Gifted with the boon of the god, Siva, Rangia killed the elephant.

With exultation at his heart, and careless of the devastation all around the lake, Rângiâ hurried from the battlefield with a tusk of the white elephant. He called out his brother from below the hut, but no response came. He climbed up the stair, found none inside, placed the tusk, took rest and set out in search of Bhutua. At a long distance in a bush Bhutua lay unconscious and his tongue too was found at a little distance. Rangia solemnly uttered the name of Mahadeva Siva for three times and cured Bhutua and restored his tongue also.

The two brothers returned home and took food and rest for a few days. Bhutua now became cautious not to utter his name first. Rangia resumed his search. Being a footmark expert, Rangia walked down slowly and followed the footmark of the *Râkshashi* (= female demon).

Rangia pursued, pursued for a few days and reached a queer place of bushes. There he found a big stone. He removed the stone and found a hole in the ground. A rope-like creeper was stretched and slid down to the bottom of the hole. The creeper was *ghilâ latâ* (=*Enteda scandens*). The demon, grasping the creeper, climbs up and climbs down. Rangia, consumed with courage & determination, climbed down into the inferno. It was a thrilling experience. He looked around and saw a small palace. He turned his steps towards the palace and there was none to obstruct him. He entered and found the princess weeping. She became astonished. He expressed his adventure and mission. She fervently appealed to rescue her. Rangia assured.

After sometime the grotesque demon came back home and became very furious to see Rangia, and instantaneously attacked Rangia. The demon was defeated and killed ultimately. The scene was awe-inspiring. The princess observed it. The moment the demon was killed, she burst out afresh and ran with Rangia. Rangia guarded her and directed her to climb up first.

Bhutua was eagerly waiting near the mouth of the tunnel. The moment the princess climbed up and stood before Bhutua, Bhutua was bewildered to see the paragon of beauty. He immediately dashed the stone and closed the mouth of the tunnel leaving Rangia inside!

In a few days Bhutua and the princess reached the capital. As they walked along the paths, Bhutua was hailed with amazement; the people clustered round him and praised him. They made long strides to reach the destination.

But the scene inside the inferno was horrible. The news of the murder of the female demon came as a terrible shock to other demons. They hurried and assembled inside the palace, saw the mangled deadbody! who dared to kill her? who rescued the princess? They

rushed and climbed up and found Rangia struggling to remove the heavy stone. They caught him; he was thrown to the bottom. The demons climbed down and fastened him to a tree. The demons had the intention to punish Rangia very, very severely and devour him. But they had to dispose and cremate the deadbody first. It took time to collect fuel, dry timber, etc. for cremation. While all the demons were engaged in the funeral rites, Rangia was left alone.

Rangia solemnly remembered the name of Mahadev Siva and requested the tree to raise its head upward till the mouth of the tunnel. The tree responded silently and started outstretching. The branch of the tree removed the stone and Rangia came out of the inferno. The tree became small again. Rangia closed the opening of the tunnel.

Rangia turned his steps towards the hut. Rangia called, but no response came from the hut. He was extremely tired. He took rest for a few days. There was no food, no provision. He grew hungrier and hungrier. He guessed the mischief of Bhutua. He lost her strength; he lost his mission and vision! He became confused and puzzled! His faculties almost failed! what strange tricks! what a treachery! What a meanness!

Bhutua was living in the royal guest-house in princely style. The princess was living in the palace. She informed her father and mother alone of the most vital secret of betrayal by Bhutua. It was kept top secret. As the days passed, many friends and relatives of the royal family came to the palace to express their pleasure at the safe return of the princess. They thanked Bhutua. They insisted on celebrating the marriage ceremony as early as possible. Bhutua gave an air of impression that the two brothers jointly fought against all evil forces, but unfortunately Rangia had been killed in the duel. Bhutua chuckled evilly. He was in idyllic happiness.

The king could not believe the statement of Bhutuâ.

But the king was in doubt. He was in a dilemma. He sent a trusted spy eastward to Nana-gomati Doapathar. The spy in disguise, moved and reached the destination. There he found Rângiâ in forlorn condition. The king's man made friendship with Rângiâ, offered him food, nursed him and restored him to normal condition. Now, the two friends turned their steps towards the capital. It took time. Rangia hobbled. Bushes & thorns bruised his feet.

The moment the two friends reached the palace, the situation was abruptly changed. The princess identified the real rescuer. All doubt was vanished. The palace became rosy. The impostor fled and fled for ever. The king was glad enough to arrange the ceremony of marriage with Rângiâ and gave half of the kingdom. Their marriage became a life-long honeymoon.

16. The Khumpai flower

In the old days in the eastern hilly region of Tripura, villages were apart from one another. The distance between two villages was about two miles, as the crow flies. There was a big village of 126 families of the Tripuri community living there. Each family had its clearing of shifting cultivation a little away from the homestead. Each village had its council of elders, and *Acâi* (= *Akcâi* = *ojha* = priest = shaman).

The *Acâi* of that village was an experienced man. He had to visit many houses to officiate worship, to divine the cause of disease and to offer sacrifice, and to prepare amulets. The priest had two daughters. The daughters would go to the *jum* field to weed and watch. There were wild animals & birds to pick cucumber, melon, maize, bean, etc. So the two unmarried sisters used to have their first meal at home cooked by their mother and their second meal packed up in leaf packet (= *mochâ bhât*) to be eaten at noon in the field-hut.

The time was about May-June. The two sisters were working in the field. Suddenly a great gust came, and

the sky became overcast with thick & black clouds. Thundering voice was heard; threatening hail-storm was about to destroy the surroundings. The two young sisters became very afraid. They stood helpless. The elder sister in soliloquy solicited help and promised to accept the helper as husband.

To their astonishment, a snake was soon found preparing a hut quickly and skilfully. The snake built the field-hut rapidly and left the spot silently. The two sisters took shelter inside the hut. A heavy rain followed immediately. In the afternoon, they returned home; they did not tell the queer incident.

The next day the sisters went to the field, and took rest & food inside the hut. The elder sister was bold enough to stick to her word. After a mutual discussion, the younger sister looked in all directions and casually loudly invited the elder sister's husband to take food: *Mâi cânâni fâidi.* Surprisingly, the snake appeared, took food and left silently. This was the first day of sharing food by the snake. The two sisters used to feed the snake every day.

The quantity of food provided by their mother used to remain the same. But it was shared by the snake. So the two sisters became a little slim. The mother wanted to know the cause of their weakness. The elder daughter avoided the question. The younger daughter disclosed the fact secretly. The mother passed it to the father. The parents put their heads together to rescue the daughter from the invisible clutch of the snake, and to save the prestige of the family from the odd incident.

One day the father said to the elder daughter: To-day do not go outside and assist your mother; and I shall go to the field along with the younger daughter. They took food to the field and worked together and at noon invited the snake from the hut. The snake started eating. Then & there, the father cut the snake with his sharp knife. The father climbed down with the snake's carcass

held on the knife and buried the snake's carcass near a waterfall.

The next day, the two sisters went together to the field and worked till the time of the mid-day meal. The younger sister made a mockery of invitation. But no response came. The elder sister insisted on knowing the happening of the previous day. The younger sister had to narrate. The elder sister sat down weeping & watching the path along which the snake would come. She climbed down and went along the path and found a patch of freshly-dug earth and a cloud of black flies hovering above it. The two sisters stood at the bottom of a gorge, a narrow, deep place between hills. The place was lonely, soundless, sylvan and cool. They stood near a waterfall. In those days wild animals & birds used to drink water from the waterfall. A steep, narrow & mountainous precipice was the outlet of the stream. The flow was neither copious nor strong.

The elder sister had a stick which she broke off from a tree; she stirred the place and found the head of the snake. A very beautiful flower plant *Khumpai*, flourished overnight near the spot. The elder sister stood helpess and remorseful; while she had been watching pensively, the *Khumpai* flower blossomed more and more, and a gush of water from the precipice made the waterfall overflooded. A rare moment of suspense: the flower was blossoming and the stream was increasing and she was being drowned. She was swept away by the exuberant current before the eyes of the younger sister. The famous river **Gomati** was mysteriously formed from that day.

The younger sister stood perplexed and looked questioningly. The drowning sister told: 'Do not weep and lament for me; this is my fate; the snake around whom your terror had crystallised was a god. Do not go back home. You leave this place, move away, travel & travel; after a long distance you will find the crossing of seven paths; a very big banyan tree stands on the crossing of

the paths. You climb the tree; you will find a loom made of gold. You weave clothes with extraordinary designs. You will be queen. This is my most sincere blessing!'

A passion or a fate or a destiny drove her headlong over all obstacles. The destiny of the elder sister completely altered the position of the younger sister. While the elder sister had been led by destiny to a small castle inside the holy river, Gomati, the younger sister found a place in a trunk of the banyan tree. A dramatic change! The lady of the tree went on spinning & weaving, perfecting designs after designs through trial & error. Now her memories, dreams and imaginations became part of her existence. When she shut her eyes she saw her parents, sister, friends & fields as though they were there in the flesh.

One ancient king of Tripura, *Raja* Subrai, had a high station to maintain. He possessed imagination and wisdom. He was a popular king. He gave great inspiration to cottage industry. As an incentive, he assured to marry the lady whose clothe would be found excellent. A wave of enterprise swept over the kingdom. The young girls became very enthusiastic; they sat on loom day and night; the members of each family put their heads together to imagine new design. For a time, it became their be-all and end-all of life. After a specific time, the king's men collected a very large variety of home-spun clothes. The clothes were displayed in the palace. The judges found the clothe of the lady of the tree excellent.

The lady of the tree was duly informed. She became very jubilant. Tears of joy rolled down and gave rise to a new river **Hâorâ**; fortune smiled on her. The king, true to his words, married her. She now blossomed into the queen of Tripura.

The king had a few other queens. But the king had no son or daughter. The king was worried. When the new queen had conceived, the king became very cheerful and hopeful. A long rope was stretched between the royal

court and the new queen's room for speedy communication of the good news. Obviously, the king loved his new wife more than the others.

The other queens became jealous, suspicious, and cliquish. They engineered a plot to make the king hate the new queen. They used to secretly pull the rope frequently; and the king had to rush only to find nothing. When, however, the first son had been born and the rope was pulled, the king did not rush immediately. The mother was lying unconscious, and the father was absent; in the meantime the clique threw the baby into the Gomati River and reported to the father that the mother had given birth to a toad. The father became frustrated. Next time, the clique committed the same tricks. It continued for several times on seven occasions.

All sorts of low whisperings and wild rumours were afloat. The king could not show his face. The new queen became the victim of jealousy & hatred. The king ordered to drive her out of the palace. The exiled queen had to live a wretched life. There was an expression of despair on her face. A sudden rush of memories would often leave her melancholic.

The elder sister, carried off earlier by the river-god, had a shelter inside the river. She recognised the seven children to be her sister's babies, and brought them up and nursed them. Years passed on. The babies grew to childhood. The elder sister narrated the history time and again. The tale of their sufferings was heard. She used to sing a song so pathetic that it would bring tears to their eyes.

The seven brothers, stung to madness by a sense of wrongs, sat down together and drew up a scheme of vengeance. For seizing an opportunity of revenge, the seven brothers started frequenting the river *ghât* from which the king's maid servants used to fetch water. At sunrise on the appointed day, they flocked together to

the special *ghât*. The seven brothers broke the seven earthen jars of the seven royal maid servants. The maid servants angrily brought new jars from the royal store-house. The seven brothers again broke the jars. They cheerfully blinked at each other.

The royal servants threatened to punish them and attempted to catch them, but failed. The children escaped all attempts of the servants. An altercation took place between the two sides. The servants became astonished to know the history, to know the conspiracy of their step-mothers. The servants reported it in various tones & intonation. The reports generated mixed reactions.
The cliquish queen started shivering; their halcyon days were not fated to last long. The king and his well-wishers, fresh with hope, sat down to a discussion. On the king's direction, the exiled queen was honourably brought back home; her dress was torn and ruffled; her hair dishevelled, her body weak and ugly. Suddenly she became restless & remembered many things. Within an hour hundreds of people thronged; the crowd and the royal parents went to the river *ghât* and made an earnest appeal to the children to come out of the water. With permission and blessing from the foster-mother, the seven sons emerged from the water one by one and came running at them. The crowd shouted with joy. The parents took them in their lap. The riverine castle and the lady were like their father & mother for years, far more important in their lives than their actual parents! Now, the riverine castle is almost empty, save for the lady, waiting and looking at the children!

Amidst hue & cry, the wicked queens were immediately dragged to a temple and sacrificed, lest they might hatch new plot like poisoning food. They sulked & intrigued, plotted & perished.

17. The *Chhatim* tree

In the interior hills of Tripura there was a village where only the Tripuris lived. There were several households of them. Their main occupation was shifting cultivation on hill-slopes. The *jum* fields were scattered all around the hamlet.

One day two young persons of a family went to work in their *jum* field. They were brother and sister. They had taken their morning meal at home, and took the mid-day meal in leaf-packet. The parents were ill; the grandmother was very old. So, the brother and the sister went together to weed, nurse, reap and guard the crops. They worked together, gossiped, became tired and hungry. They had earlier built a small hut (= *Gairing*) for watching and resting. Now, they took rest there and ate the mid-day meal. They resumed their work. While going back home in the afternoon with vegetables, leaves, roots, etc. they used to bathe in a stream. Such was their daily routine for about a week, while their sick parents lay in bed.

One day, the sister was bathing in the stream, and the brother had a momentary peep. The sylvan and solitary atmosphere further kindled the passion of the young brother. They worked together, watched the sky, warded off the birds, smelled the mud and bathed for about a week during the absence of their parents. So far, the brother and the sister were on kindly and respectful terms.

The peeping perplexed him. Something unusual & unsocial crept in his mind. However, the evil had not its wild outburst at the moment. He became serious and silent and a little abnormal. He did not eat that night. It was embarrassing to the elders of the family.

The elders did their best to make the boy speak. He adamantly refused to speak a single word. The elders continued their efforts for hours and made all sorts of kind proposals to him. He was asked whether he would

like to eat this or that type of food, vegetables, rice, fruit, fish or meat? whether he would like to have any dress or ornament? whether he would like to have a visit outside? whether he would like to have the company of his friends? He obstinately refused to speak a word in reply.

The elders made their last proposal. He was asked whether he would like to marry? At this proposal, he stared at them and showed a slight emotion. So, they proposed the names of many girls. But he repeatedly said: No, No. Ultimately, the name of the sister was uttered. Now, he nodded. It was to his liking. It was his only condition. He even seemed gay.

But the elders were horrified. How can they agree? It was unsocial, uncommon and unthinkable. The elders became puzzled, confused and troubled by the boy's strange attitude. Does not that condition alone go far to prove the boy's abnormality? Will it get the approval of the village council? What would be her reaction, if she were once made aware of it? As a stopgap arrangement, the elders of the family secretly gave consent and assured to make necessary arrangement during the next winter season.

Days passed, months passed. The family apparently continued its normal life. The matter was kept confined to four members: parents, grandmother and the boy. The girl had gone to her bed and fell asleep at the last moment of compromise. Initially she became annoyed, but she could not anticipate such an extremely unsocial desire. Disgusted with the brother's silence, she retired for rest.

After a few months, the grandmother was engaged in drying the rice and other crops in the courtyard. The grand-daughter was engaged inside in cooking. The parents and the boy went to the fields. In the meantime one cock was frequently coming and eating rice unless closely watched. The hungry cock taxed the patience of the old lady. In soliloquy the old woman murmured: Cock,

how long will you disturb me? We shall sacrifice you on the occasion of the marriage between my grandson and grand-daughter.

The grand-daughter overheard it. She came forward and fervently saught an explanation. Now, the girl became extremely socked. She started weeping. The neighbours came to console her. By that time, the parents and the boy came back home. All sorts of strange rumours were now flying about the family and comments were being made on the extraordinary behaviour of the boy.

There was a tall *Chhatim* tree (*Alstonia scholaris*) in front of the village. In the shade of it, a group of the village boys used to play games. The girl ran away and climbed the tree, and mounted branch by branch to the top. The villagers followed, but could not catch her. They made all sorts of appeal and proposal to convince her. Birds and animals were sacrificed. The youths clenched their fists, and gnashed their teeth against the boy. On the direction of the village elder, the boy was sacrificed.

Suddenly, the soul of the boy turned into a chameleon. The chameleon climbed the tree. The girl climbed the top of the tree and prayed to god for a heavenly abode. The prayer was granted. To help her in ascending, the tree temporarily became very tall. She broke the top branches of the tree, so that none could climb after her, and accompanied the god.

The boy often shoots his arrows to hurt the girl. The rain is her tears and the lightning is her cry. The boy loved and lost his life. This is why the chameleon becomes red whenever it encounters a human being. And this is why the top of the *Chhatim* tree is flat : twigs springing from several stems form a flat surface, an unvel.

18. The queen's self-sacrifice

A benevolent king lived in Tripura. His face had the expression of determination. He was indeed a statesman.

The queen was pious and kind-hearted. A fine row of strong white teeth would be seen at the moment of her smile.

In a certain part of the kingdom, there was no big tank of water. The subjects brought it to the notice of the king. The king gladly arranged to dig a large tank there. But there was no water in it, though it was big and deep enough. Not only the villagers, but also the king and the queen were in great disappointment.

One night, the king had a very sad dream. One deity foretold : If the queen is sacrificed, water will come up; if the queen slowly and solemnly walks towards the centre of the tank, water will emerge. But the queen will have to submerge herself. No attempt should be made to rescue her.

At dawn when the king awoke, he wondered: How can I make such a sacrifice? How can I disclose it? How can I come out of the trouble, out of the dilemma?

The king was in great despair. He summoned his friends, advisers and ministers to his council. The councillors were divided in their opinion. The issue was so delicate that no body dared to give clear opinion.

Anyway, the queen guessed it and came to know the problem. She gladly volunteered to sacrifice herself. For the welfare of the subjects, she was ready to die.

At last, on the direction of the king, the royal astrologers ascertained an auspicious date. On the appointed date, thousands of villagers got assembled on the bank of the tank. The worship of the Ganga-devi was arranged. No animal was sacrificed. The priests and ministers reached there earlier.

The air was rent with shouts of praise in honour of the king and the queen. Amidst agony and applause, surprise and suspense the elephants carrying the royal family reached the bank of the tank. The members of the royal family discended confidently and cautiously amid the bustle of preparations for the tragedy.

The local residents became extremely sorry for the demand of digging the tank. Their repentance knew no bound. They lay down and wept. The agony haunted them. Many faces were bedewed with tears. They felt their nerves straining.

But the king and the queen remained absolutely calm and quiet. The king did not punish the subjects. The queen did not curse the villagers. Instead, the king and the queen blessed and pacified the people.

Now the moment came for the queen to walk alone, to go ahead alone. The king stood like a stone! what a heavy weight on the head that wears a crown! The supreme moment was one of silence of a graveyard! The chief priest led the queen. The final parting! Knowing fully well that death is inevitable, the queen remained steadfast. She gave a look around solemnly! She did not jump; she simply waded placing her feet carefully, so that she would not slip. The moment she had stepped in, water started oozing out from the four sides of the tank. Gradually and gradually, her feet, ankles, legs, knees, waist, head went under water. She was no longer seen! Thousands of spectators thronged, stood in groups, whispered, sat with their hands clasped round the knees or with their legs stretched before them and shouted: *Maharani!* long live, long live!

The sanctity of the tank, hallowed by the sacrifice of the queen and the magnificence of the temple on the eastern bank of the tank and the temporary residence of some kings and officers of Tripura there, made it an object of veneration throughout Tripura. Pilgrims and tourists come here to offer their devotions. The tragic tank henceforth came to be known after her name!

19. A Monkey & a Girl

In the interior hills of Tripura there was a village where only the Tripuris lived. There were 126 households of them. The village was located on a hill. It was

surrounded by the fields of shifting cultivation.

One day seven girls of the village went together to the fields and found a number of monkeys relishing the crops and damaging the fields. The girls became very angry. The youngest girl went ahead and hounded the accompanying dogs to drive away the monkeys. The dogs, barking loudly, drove the monkeys away. The monkeys decamped. There was a tall tree in front of the field; chief of the monkeys was sitting there and observing the situation. The chief decided to take revenge against the youngest girl.

The girls spent hours in the fields, singing, weeding, nursing the plants and reaping some vegetables. The real touch of Tripura is to be found in the hills and rural villages. There the hum of insects and chirp of birds constitute a part of life..There is an abundance of greenary and granary.

In the afternoon the girls with their crops put inside their baskets turned their steps homeward. On their way back home, about a hundred feet below a stream rolled along. The shadows of trees on all sides of the spring and the stream made the place cool, gentle, hospitable and solitary. Putting the clothes on a branch of a tree, the girls were bathing and sporting.

In the meantime, the monkeys were watching the movements of the girls. While the girls were frolicking, the monkey-chief silently swooped down, took the clothes and ran away. After bathing, the girls came ashore and did not find their clothes. They became confused, frightened and nervous. A shame indeed!

They walked a little and stood in the shade of a swaying and dripping tree and looked all around. At last they found the monkeys sitting high above on the branch of a tall tree, and the clothes were blowing a little in the wind. The girls cried, wept and made earnest appeal. Ultimately, the eldest girl placed a portion of her crops on a cavity of the tree. One monkey climbed down with

her clothe, took the crops and dropped the clothe. The second girl surrendered some crops and got back the clothe. Thus, the first six girls got back their clothes one after another.

But when the seventh girl went to give up the vegetables, the chief of the monkeys suddenly twitched and kidnapped her. The girls tried their best to pacify the monkeys, but failed. They hurried back home and reported the matter. The villagers came to the spot with sling and bow & arrow. By that time, the monkeys fled and retired in deep and distant forest. The villagers returned with a heavy heart. With the distance of time & space, wild imagination went on increasing in volume and volubility.

The chief of the monkeys married the girl. In course of time, she gave birth to a baby. The baby was named Tate. The monkeys used to collect edible fruits and vegetables for their new queen. But she detested them from the core of her heart. She was longing to escape. She had to wear a mechanical smile.

Now, she pretended to be pregnant again and wished to eat hog-plum, a rare fruit at that time. All attempts to search out the fruit failed. One day the chief himself went out. She took that opportunity to escape. The chief returned empty-handed and found the cottage too empty. He sat down watching the path along which she would come. But she did not return.

The chief and other monkeys became very anxious. They wandered in the forest and asked all. At last one person admitted to have seen a mother and a child moving along a certain path. The chief followed the path, grew weary, sat down to rest and ultimately reached the distination. He became happy to see his wife and son. He held his dear son on his lap and the son's slim legs were swinging. He exchanged a look with the parents-in-law.

The young boys and girls of the village were about to

kill the monkey-chief. But the girl's father pacified them and advised them to wait. In honour of the son-in-law, the father of the girl arranged a small ceremony. The elders of the village were invited. They sat down to that unusual rite of drinking rice-beer. But they cast a mistrustful glance at the exceptional guest. The son-in-law sipped cheerfully; his face was flushed. She poured him one after another jar of rice-beer. Heavily drunk, the monkey-chief lay unconscious and fell asleep. When the family was safely asleep, she got up very quietly and widened the crevice of platform of the hut. Below the platform, pigs & swines were sheltered as the usual practice. The monkey-chief slipped and fell below and the swines rushed to tear the monkey-chief into pieces.

20. Punish the original criminal

In a hilly hamlet lived a few families of shifting cultivators. One day one shifting cultivator went to the clearing and cut down bushes & shrubs. While returning home in the afternoon, he bathed in a stream and sharpened his knife seating on a stone in the stream. His knees were below the water-level; a prawn slowly advanced to whimsically bite the cultivator.

Being upset by the pain, the cultivator instantly cut the top end of a bamboo which stood curved because of the weight of the leafy twigs. Unburdened, the bamboo quickly stood straight and hit a squirrel.

Being restless by the pain, the squirrel jumped from branch to branch and found a big fruit. The squirrel rushed to eat the fruit. The fruit slipped and fell on a deer.

Being afraid, the deer fled recklessly. In the wilderness, many leaves lay thick upon the ground. Decomposed leaves in a humid soil provided ideal shelter to many types of insects and ants. The deer, while running swiftly, had to tread the nest of the ants.

Being very annoyed, the ants moved up and down

the adjacent places, plants & trees. The ants found a bat resting on a shadowy branch of a tree.

Being terrorized, the bat fled and took refuge inside the big ear of an elephant. The elephant lay asleep on a high hill full of stones. Being confused, the elephant hastily stood awake and jerked the ears and kicked out a stone.

Being dislodged, the stone rolled and rolled and fell on a hut several feet below. The inmate of the hut was an aged widow.

Being very nervous, the poor woman came out of the hut; she was under nature's call untimely; she went rushly to the adjacent stream and discharged a large quantity of urine and excrements into the stream.

The stream had been flowing about five hundred feet below. It was, as if, the life-line of the villagers. The villagers were dependant on it for washing, bathing and drinking. Drinking the contaminated water, most of the villagers fell ill.

Being plaintiff, the villagers complained against the old widow. At the village-chief's residence the council of elders sat in the evening. In old days, justice was quick, visible, cheap and on the spot. On the chief's direction, the attendant (= *Khândal*) summoned the widow. The accused was given a chance for self-defence. The proceedings were as follows:

Chaudhuri : Widow! why did you discharge and spoiled the water of the stream?

Widow : Because the stone destroyed my hut.

The charge against the widow was confuted and the stone was summoned.

Chaudhuri : Stone! why did you destroy the hut of the poor widow?

Stone : Because the elephant kicked me out.

The stone was found innocent, & the elephant was summoned.

Chaudhuri : Elephant! why did you kick out the stone?

Elephant : Because the bat entered into my ear.
Chaudhuri : Bat! why did you enter into the ear of the elephant?
Bat : Beacuse the ants bit me.
Chaudhuri : Ants? why did you bite the bat?
Ants : Because the deer trod us.
Chaudhuri : Deer! why did you tread the ants?
Deer : Because the big fruit fell on my body.
Chaudhuri : Fruit! why did you fall on the deer?
Fruit : Because the squirrel went to eat me.
Chaudhuri : Squirrel! why did you go to eat the fruit?
Squirrel : Because the bamboo hit me.
Chaudhuri : Bamboo! why did you hit the squirrel?
Bamboo : Because the cultivator cut my top end.
Chaudhuri : Cultivator! why did you cut the top end of the bamboo?
Cultivator : Because the prawn bit me.
Chaudhuri : Prawn! why did you bite the cultivator?
Prawn : Sir! I went to bite him whimsically.

According to the village council, the chain of reactions had its origin in the whimsical behaviour of the prawn. So all other accused were released and the prawn was found guilty. The prawn was directed to purify the water immediately and by any means.

21. The Frog's rumour about Kolkata & trials

In a certain rural village lived a rich farmer. It was a traditional joint family of at least three generations. In a dark corner of the house lived a frog also.

The grandchildren of the house were completing their primary education in the village *Pâthsâlâ*. Some of them started going to the distant city of Calcutta for higher education. A visit to Calcutta was a thrilling experience. The magnificent buildings, straight and broad streets, cars, crowd, the dazzling pomp of the visit of the dignitaries appealed to the sensibilities of the children of countryside. When they used to go back home on

holidays, the aged people and neighbours were eager to know the stories of Calcutta. The old frog too was very attentive in listening the conversation.

In those days, the representative guides from the *tirtha-Kshetras* like Gaya, Kasi, Vrindaban, used to visit the villages of the country for the pilgrimage of the villagers. The family of the farmer decided for a pilgrimage of the elderly persons of the family. An auspicious day in the month of *Aswin* (September-October) was fixed by the astrologer. On the appointed date a number of elderly persons under the guidance of the *Pândâ* started their journey.

The anecdotes of Calcutta drew forth excitement in the mind of the frog. The frog decided to follow the pilgrims. It was a very tedious journey. But the frog had tremendous force of will. The frog reached Calcutta and stayed there and observed many things.

But a visit to Calcutta made the frog a bit critical of the material achievement of the human beings. Now, in his mind there is a difference of notion between Calcutta unvisited and Calcutta visited. The frog and a tailor bird (= *Tun tuni*) were friends. The tailor bird was waiting. The frog came back home and made long conversation with his friend. The frog concluded his expression thus: Revolutionary changes, convulsion, riots, destruction and death will make life unbearable. It will be wise to take safe custody as early as possible!

Considering the impending crisis, the tailor bird flew in fear and entered into the mouth of an adjutant stork (= *Hârgila*). This unexpected and sudden incident was very troublesome to the adjutant stork. The adjutant stork started groaning.

The adjutant bird was perching on an adjacent tree. A monkey was eating a *Cindrâ* (= a kind of fruit grown in the *jum* field). The monkey suddenly heard the cry of the adjutant bird. The monkey became nervous. The fruit slipped out of the hand of the monkey.

In the shade of the tree in which the monkey had been roosting, a female deer was taking rest. The deer was pregnant. The fruit fell suddenly on the back of the deer. It caused severe pain; the deer ran in pain and fear.

A long and large python was lying in sleep in the forest. The innocent deer had no intention to trample any living being. She was simply running. The snake was trodden accidentally.

The snake, being awaked, started moving; on the way the snake found a jungle fowl. The fowl was hatching. The snake devoured the eggs of the fowl.

The fowl, out of grief, started scratching recklessly. In the wilderness, many leaves lay thick upon the ground; no body cared to take them up. Decomposed leaves in a humid soil provide ideal shelter to insects. Below the layer of the leaves the poisonous red ants found a shelter. The scratching seriously disturbed the ants.

The ants rushed and started to bite a swine. The wild swine was sleeping at that time. The attacks by hundreds of ants made the swine restless. The swine ran and ravaged the crops of a shifting cultivation.

The shifting cultivator lodged a complain against the swine. The *Chaudhuri* of the village summoned the swine and asked questions.

Chaudhuri : Swine ! why did you ravage the crops?
Swine : Because the ants bit me.
Chaudhuri : Ants ! why did you bite the swine?
Ants : Because the fowl ravaged our shelter.
Chaudhuri : Fowl ! why did you ravage the shelter of the ants?
Fowl : Because the python devoured my eggs.
Chaudhuri : Python ! why did you devour the eggs of the hen?
Python : Because the deer trampled me.
Chaudhuri : Deer ! why did you tread the python?
Deer : Because the monkey dropped a heavy fruit on my back.

Chaudhuri : Monkey ! why did you drop the fruit?
Monkey : Because the adjutant bird cried out so loudly!
Chaudhuri : Adjutant bird ! why did you cry out?
Adjutant bird : Because the tailor bird entered into my mouth.
Chaudhuri : Tailor bird ! why did you enter into the mouth of the adjutant bird?
Tailor bird : Because the frog warned me in view of the impending danger!

The village council found the frog guilty in the ultimate investigation. According to the verdict, others were set free. To punish the guilty, salt and chilli were besmeared on the body of the frog; and then the frog was held fast with a jackfruit tree. The frog, out of pain, rubbed his body against the tree. This is why the body of the frog is prickly; and the Indian toad's skin is rough and warty. Some city-made news & views puzzled the frog !

22. The Frog & the Tailor-bird

In a marshy place lived a small frog. Up in the adjacent mountain lived a small Tailor-bird. There was friendship betweeen the frog and the bird. The bird had the advantage of moving through the air swiftly & freely. But the frog was confined to a small, dirty & muddy place. The bird often used to bring various news and to make the discussion between the two friends lively. So the bird had an air of condescension.

To outwit the friend, the frog planned to undertake a long & tedious journey to the medieval capital city of Tripura. One fine morning in an early winter, the frog went out from the marshy place. It took many days to complete the journey. The farther the the frog walked, the stranger was the scenery. In the course of the journey, the frog gained a lot of experience and information. At last, the frog returned safely.

Meanwhile, the journey became a topic of common

discussion. A little later many neighbours visited the traveller, and the traveller elaborately described the memories of the journey. They spent many evenings thus & discussed the news. Being pressed by the bird to convey any serious information, the frog expressed a great anxiety and after a pause, a moment later, disclosed the forecast of sad news of a terrible cyclone in near future. A horrible cyclone accompanied by hailstorm, heavy shower, earthquake, deluge & darkness, will leave everything disordered & shattered.

The frog became buoyant & cheerful with the opportunity of displaying his experience. The frog next said: I am convinced about the inevitability of the calamity and so I am thinking of taking refuge inside a bomboo pipe. But I am worried about your safety. Where will you go & reside?

The Tailor-bird said: Friend! kindly give me an advice.

The frog said: Friend! do one thing; at the very beginning of the ensuing cyclone, you are to move eastward, and up in the mountains you will find the *Rabâng* bird perching on a branch of a big tree. The *Rabâng* bird will keep its mouth wide open; you are to enter into the mouth of the *Rabâng* bird.

After a few months, the cyclone started blowing from the Bay of Bengal in south-west. A howling gust of wind rode menacingly across the countryside of Tripura. It struck cruelly. According to the advice of the frog, the bird quickly moved eastward and found the *Rabâng* bird. Without any delay, the Tailor-bird entered into the wide mouth of the *Rabâng* bird.

Being surprised, the *Rabang* bird screamed with a shrill cry. Something very serious had happened. At that very moment a monkey was climbing up the tree with a gourd in his paws. The sudden screeching cry of the *Rabâng* bird struck terror in the mind of the monkey. The gourd abruptly fell on the back of a deer. The deer was frightened and stood perturbed and ran away frantically.

Tripura abounds in ants, leeches, mosquitoes, gnats, insects, snakes, etc. While scampering off in panic, the deer trod a snake. The snake was seriously injured. The mobile snake now became immobile.

Near the hole of the snake, there were bushes & layers of fallen leaves. It was an ideal resort for ants. It was the dwelling place of the *Arali* ant (= *Orali piprâ*). They belong to a specific group; they are reddish, aggressive, active, & poisonous; their stinging causes acute pain. Unable to move & hunt, the snake devoured the eggs of those ants.

The ants became very angry and revengeful. They swarmed and stung a wild boar. The thrust of numerous stings into the flesh of the boar caused acute pain and disease. The testicles of the boar were badly affected. With the swollen testicles, the boar became unable to move freely.

An old widow had her paddy field near that mountain. The poor boar struggled to collect food, walked limpingly and found the widow's paddy field. It was the nearest and the only source of food. So, the boar consumed a lot of paddy.

The old widow was living in her hut alone. The wild beast would ruin her. She beat her forehead. But she must drive away the beast by frightening. To scare the depredator, she set up a scare-crow, and also a scare-flutter; but in vain. She had no time to continue the loss. Now she ventured to sit in the shade of a tree near the field and to beat the trunk of the tree, and to howl alternately.

The innocent tree became annoyed and hurt. Unable to bear the pain, the tree made a representation of its pains to the royal court. The complaint was against the widow.

The royal court admitted the complaint with the calmness of a benevolent patriarch. There must be some way of finding out, of proving the fact. The court soon

sent the royal *pâik & peyadâ* to summon the widow. Walking tedious tracks & dingy paths, sometimes with ascension & descension, the *pâik & peyadâ* reached the residence of the widow, and brought her to the royal court.

The king seated, and the *paik & peyada* standing with weapons and the widow standing with folded hands. She looked sad & helpless. The king asked: Did you beat the tree?

The widow answered: *Mahârâj*! I have beaten the tree, only to scare away the boar. The boar consumed my paddy. I should have a remedy for this. So, the boar should be held responsible.

The king's *pâik & peyadâ* summoned the boar.

The king asked: Did you consume the widow's paddy?

The boar replied: *Mahârâj*! I have consumed the widow's paddy. Being stung by numerous ants, I have been seriously affected & diseased; for mere survival I ate her paddy. So, the ants should be punished.

The king's *pâik & peyadâ* summoned the ants.

The king asked: Did you sting the boar?

The ants repiled: *Mahârâj!* we stung the boar, because the snake devoured our eggs. We could not control our paternal affection. So, the snake should be punished.

The king's *pâik & peyadâ* summoned the snake.

The king asked: Did you devour the eggs of the ants?

The snake replied: *Mahârâj!* I have devoured the eggs. An accident by stampede rendered me handicapped. One deer trod me. Henceforth, I am unable to move freely for my food. Therefore, the deer should be accused.

The king's *pâik & peyadâ* summoned the deer.

The king asked: Did you tread the snake?

The deer replied: *Mahârâj!* I have trodden the snake unknowingly. One big gourd suddenly fell on my back. Being afraid of a hunter, I frantically fled. So, the monkey, from whose paws the gourd was slipped, should be given a lesson.

The king's *pâik & peyadâ* summoned the monkey.
The king asked: What had happened to you?
The monkey responded: *Mahârâj!* the *Rabâng* bird's squall terrified & unnerved me; at that moment of confusion the gourd felt out of my hand, striking the deer as it fell.

The king's *pâik & peyadâ* summoned the *Rabâng* bird.
The king asked the *Rabâng* bird: What was the matter?
The *Rabâng* bird pleaded: *Mahârâj!* one Tailor-bird ghastfully entered into my mouth; it caused terrible suffocation. I was about to die. So, I had to squall.

The king's *pâik & peyadâ* summoned the Tailor bird.
The king asked: What made you to infiltrate into the mouth of the *Rabâng* bird?
The Tailor-bird pleaded: *Mahârâj!* the frog warned me about a devastating cyclone and advised me to take refuge into the mouth of the *Rabâng* bird. He related to us the details of journey. He informed us that he was astonished at the grandeur of the capital & that he met with several people.

The king's *pâik & peyadâ* summoned the frog.
The king asked: What made you to warn the Tailor-bird so sternly and wrongly?
The frog said: *Mahârâj!* in course of my journey to the capital, I heard so many news & rumours. I explained those news to my neighbours & friends.

The king said: But, cyclone, hailstorm, floods are annual affairs in Tripura. There is nothing uncommon. You have committed a crime by magnifying those news and by misguiding the Tailor-bird.

The king ordered the *pâik & peyadâ* to beat the frog thoroughly.
The others were acquitted & declared innocent. The exemplary punishment left a mark on the back of the frog: the frog became warty.

23. Sarmâ & Raimâ

Siva, the primeval patriarch, had two sons, namely Sivrâi and Hângrâi respectively. The patriarch duly

bequeathed his very vast kingdom to his eldest son. He expected the prince to think and behave exactly like himself.

Sivrâi was a wise statesman. He was a benevolent king. His capability, justice and generosity became well-known. The kingdom became peaceful, and the subjects became prosperous and grateful. The subjects used to exalt him highly. Security, justice, patronage and fraternity were the principal concern of the king. Sivrâi was an ideal monarch. After a long period of successful administration, the monarch desired to select his successor. The monarch had two sons, namely. Ompreng and Dongukhrui. Ompreng was least interested in public administration; he was easy-going, otherworldly and gourmand. Dongukhrui was a practical man of affairs. So Sivrai duly bequeathed his kingdom to Dongukhrui.

The new king was handsome & healthly, intelligent and active. Under his able leadership, the subjects were happy and loyal. The ruling principle of the king was to maintain law & order, and to leave the subjects least disturbed.

Ompreng was the priest of the village. He had two daughters & one son, namely Oâing Jângrimâ, Gring Jângrimâ, & Likâi. The priest had to officiate the rites & rituals of this or that house of the big village. He had neither time nor inclination to look after his own family & farm. Likâi was a mere child. So, the two daughters had to do all sorts of domestic jobs.

All those families, during those days, had to derive much of their subsistence from the forest. They subsisted partly by collecting & gathering, and partly by food production & animal husbandry and crafts. Their technique of food production was the slash-and-burn method. Each family had to select a hillslope for clearing & planting. The jungles & bushes had to be cut down during the dewy season and left to dry for weeks & then burned in early winter.

The two sisters had to undertake all the energetic labour. For days after days they had to set out in the morning, to work in the field, to take the mid-day meal in the field and to return home in the afternoon. It was a daily trudge, as many neighbours had to do the same.

Time passes very quickly & silently. The two sisters had now blossomed into youths. They were active, young & experienced; they had the fancies of girlhood. They did not take care to build a temporary hut of bamboos & timber & thatching grass on an elevated platform in the centre of the field from which to watch the crops. The hut (= *Gâireng*) was indsipensable to farming. But their father was indifferent to those requirements. They did hardly get anything at home. His temperance, his indifference to family affairs, his religious ferver, his devotion to the village affairs, endeared him to all, but caused troubles to the children.

Here happened something never contemlpated by the father & the daughters. Dongukhrui posed himself as an able king. But his overlordship was a mere pose. He used to indulge in boastful talk. He was a braggart and shallow pretender to virtues. He looked at the elder daughter suspiciously; he could not resist the temptation to impress her with his splendour. He wanted to have her. But two considerations stood on the way: horror of incest, and *noblesse oblige*. The glamour was a wild & savage impulse.

One day while the two sisters had been working in the field, a mighty thunder broke the stillness of the midday. The hopes of their comfort were damped by violent gusts of wind. They felt helpless. They were in dire peril. There was no hut to take shelter in. A heavy rainfall was impending. And there came the anxious moment when the two girls had to seek assistance. The elder sister implored the forest-deity earnestly for making a hut; and for that act of benevolence she promised to marry the benign benefactor. The feeling of security & the ownership which a hut would offer, were lacking.

Dongukhrui lay hidden in the nearby forest; he heard the prayer. In the disguise of a snake, he rapidly built a hut. The two sisters were astonishingly watching the operation; and they took shelter in the hut. They hesitated for a moment. The elder sister held herself back from saying a word. She had the qualm of conscience to marry the snake; and that too so hastily! Her conscience prompted her to stick to the promise. The simplest ceremony of marriage took place then & there. The snake retired to the forest alone and stayed down there for a few days, unless there was something quite urgent to be attened to up there.

Time went on; the two sisters continued their routine work as usual. In the dewy season, when the sun begins to lose its heat, and when the days get colder & shorter, the shifting cultivators of eastern India begin to select the the site and to cut down the bushes. The two sisters had to undertake all those oprerations. They used to carry packets of meal to the field and to eat the meal at noon. At the time of lunch, the younger sister had to invite the snake thus: Brother-in-law! lunch is ready, water is ready, come,come! In response to the invitation the snake used to come, eat & drink and depart.

For days after days, the lunch of two persons was being shared by three. So, the two sisters were being reduced in bulk & weight. The young sister, in particular, was left smarting under a sense of fear & humiliation. She found it difficult to bear with it; how could a human love tolerate it! so, she decided to confide to her father. One day she got an opportunity; she confessed to her father all that had occurred.

The father was imperfectly informed; he became very worried about the sad episode. His brother, in the disguise of a snake, took advantage of the crisis. It shocked him terribly. He became impatient & revengeful. He listened. He was dazed. A feeling of nausea, a dizziness clamped upon his chest & stomach; he was so utterly taken by

surprise that for a moment he seemed to have reached the stage of collapsing by a sudden heart attack.

One day the elder daughter fell indisposed. Disordered in health, she declined to go to the field. The father and the younger daughter went to the field, worked till noon and then climbed up the hut to take rest and to eat the lunch. As usual, the younger daughter invited the snake. The father was in ambuscade, hiding behind the door with a sharp knife to attack by surprise. The snake was about to cross the threshold, before the father had sprung upon the snake and cut the snake with one sweep of the knife. The father & the daughter dug a deep pit in the jungle and thrust the dead body into the pit, and filled the pit with mud & leaves to effect a natural look. They thoroughly washed the hut. They came back home, bathed, changed dress and took the evening meal. They behaved quite normally, as if nothing had happened.

The next day the two sisters resumed their job. At noon they stopped working for a while, climbed the ladder and settled themselves on the platform of the hut. Being directed by the elder sister, the younger sister invited the brother-in-law, & shouted to him! But no response! The elder sister became sad & suspicious, and wanted to know the mystery. The younger sister kept silent.

The elder sister became restless; she climbed down the ladder (= *Yâklai*) and walked up and down the field. She had a pet dog. The dog knew where the dead body of the snake had been stashed & buried. The dog drew her to that dark spot. She hurried across to the edge of the field. A few drops of blood fell there. The father had planted on the grave a small, bulbous shrub of the lily flower (= *Khumpui*). The elder sister stamped up & down the spot and found her husband's grave. The smell was there still. Now the mystery became clear fast. In a dreadful fear, she returned with all haste and gave the younger sister a sad look and then again went back to the spot. She spoke, as if, to him and answered. She stood cross-legged

and waited and bewailed. Her tragic words reverberated thus:

Khumpui has begun to bloom,
Stream is rising in gloom!
He is buried only here,
Murder made him eternally dear!

She had no fear for herself, for she was sincere at heart, full of love. The drops of blood profusely increased; the overflow was owing to the tears of Oâing Jangrima weeping for her husband. A strong current was flowing below her feet; soon the current was roaring below the waist and them below the chest, until at last she was carried away by the deluge. He desired & died. She loved & lost.

The younger sister went down the steep track with a hurried step and followed the elder sister, and entreated her to return, but failed to convince her; she cried & shouted to her! On returning from the tragic spot, the younger sister's remorse was such that she felt herself unforgivable. She narrated it and fell unconscious. It was dreadful to think of the tragedy; the younger sister's life at this period became distressful. She argued with herself continually and came to the conclusion that she herself had been partly resposible for the tragedy and that she should commit suicide. The more she thought of it the more she was convinced that suicide on her part was her only way to peace. Death and death only would be balm to the soul of the younger sister. Thus convinced, one day she committed suicide near that spot.

A stream had already appeared on the spot out of the blood of the snake and out of the tears of the elder sister. The stream had been known as *Sarmâ*.

Another stream now appeared nearby out of the tears of the younger sister. This stream came to be known as *Râimâ*. The two streams flowed nearer one another, formed a valley.

The two streams met and got united and the confluence came to be known as *Gomati*. And quiet flows the *Gomati*.

24. Kânchanmâlâ

The alien hordes once threateningly moved towards the frontiers of Tripurâ, as they often had done, for plundering, ravaging, kidnapping and killing.

In response, the forces of Tripura were being similarly concentrated. The feudal forces of Tripurâ had to leave family & field, and to move on foot and to wage hand-to-hand fight with some traditional weapons. The two opposite forces used to advance and to clash, sword against sword, stick against stick.

On the occasion of crisis, when a massenger with a royal signal in hand, reached a village, a young man escaped and absconded. The absconder had his residence in the hills, and his wife's name was Kânchanmâlâ. They were married only a few months ago. They were very fond of each other. Kânchanmâlâ was healthy, handsome, careful & confident. Their wedded life was happy. Every eye was fixed upon the couple. The neighbours used to visit them; they would receive them courteously.

Kânchanmâlâ's husband's elder brother was an employee in the royal administration. The elder brother was fascinated by the beauty of Kânchanmâlâ. He was apparently on good terms with the couple. But he was secretly contriving to eliminate the younger brother. Meanwhile the news of the battle of Hâchi Khung came. And the younger brother fled into the deep hills temporarily. The elder brother took it as an opportunity; he proceeded to turn the episode to his own advantage and to fish out of troubled water. He indirectly and remotely had informed the royal army officers, who sent *sepoys* to arrest the absconder. He did it from the capital. Pulling the string from the distant capital, he posed to be a well-wisher of the younger brother & his wife.

Within a few days, one day in the early morning as soon as Kânchanmâlâ had finished some domestic jobs, she saw the royal police standing around her house. A few constables were grouped in the village path, talking together and watching and their faces expressing a terror. She was surprised and shocked to see the besiegers. She cried out and said weepingly:

We have been married the other day
We have had a short time to stay.
The holy pandal stands even to-day
The sacred symbol is yet to decay.
The bambooes used for pandal decoration
Even now give our gardens protection.

The king's *sepoys* look like a flock of red hens
The king's spies look like a flock of white herons.
Your elder brother is in royal administration
From him seek a wise instruction
It will be a strategy good
To sacrifice a he-goat from the wood.
Bow down to god, lie prostrate on sand
With donation in both the hands.

Meanwhile, encircling the house the *sepoys* advanced down to the staircase of the hut; the inmates were in a very critical tension. They called each to the other. The husband said:

The *sepoys* have advanced upon the staircase for arrest
How can I now flee into the deep forest?
They will soon make a shout
There is no way out.
Oh dear! wipe out your tears
Check your anxiety, your fear
Give me a rice-packet for food
Remain at home in a careful mood.

While several *sepoys* & spies stood encircling the house, a few of them climbed up and entered the hut,

and demanded soft mattress for sitting there on. The poor husband unfurled a nice mattress. Afflicted and harassed, Kânchanmâlâ again uttered a few words thus:

The nuptial perfume served like a magic spell.
And still gives us pleasant smell.
The remnants of the marriage feast are all seen
The used banana leaves still remain green.
The remanants of the sacrificial fire are all around
Ashes, flowers, & fruits are to be found.
A home-spun bed-cover did I keep
On which we are yet to sleep
How can I remain alone in the dale
Take me with you along the vale.
In the battle-field if your blood pour out past
I will rest there for ever at last.

Tears surged in the heart of the husband also.
He tried to divert her attention with the words:
We are gallantly marching westward
For defending our motherland forward.
We hold it our duty whatever befall
It misfits that tears from your eyes fall.
Holding a pole, you may be lost in thought
Dry the wet clothes, the battle will be bravely fought.

Holding a bamboo of the fire-place, you may be lost in thought
Preserve the pots, to the aggressors a lesson will be taught.
If you need a brinjal, seek from the elder brother's house
If you need salt, seek from the elder brother's house
If you need a pestle, seek from the elder brother's house.

These were the last words they spoke to each other. Then he departed along with the *sepoys*. At the army officer's order he was sent to the battle-field in the western frontier. There he fought and poured out his last drop of blood. Mortally wounded, he breathed his last in the battle-field of Hâchi khung.

All this the elder brother knew; he knew what had

happened to his brother. He had one thing in his mind, and another in his speech and a third in deed.

About two months had flown. Kanchanmala was very anxiously waiting for news. She did not go to the elder brother's house for vegetables, spices and tools. Every day at dawn noises awoke her. Night after night she passed without sleep. When she awoke, she would find herself alone. She would walk up & down sadly and perform her jobs. She prepared a kind of country-liquor for her husband.

After about two months of stay in the capital, the elder brother turned his steps homeward. As soon as he had reached the village, Kânchanmâlâ rushed out and leered at him and entreated him to come to her hut first. She served him water and seat, and offered him as much liqour as he could drink. To each of her question, he evasively gave brief reply. He said: The brother has been stashed in a splendid building having elephant's trunk-like towers. The elder brother did go back to his own home that day. What she would like to hear was avoided.

Kânchanmâlâ sat there in her house a long while motionless, thinking and thinking and expecting the return of her husband to-day or tomorrow! But why does the elder brother come to her house so frequently? It would be a shame; she retorted with disgust. She remained faithful to her husband. She gave the cunning wooer a sour look. She was seething with a mental anguish. Bereft of will-power, but faithful to her husband, she passed her days looking to the path. Her eyes became dull, skin wrinkled & clothes dirty.

25. Tragedy of a *Noai* bird

Long ago in the hills of Tripura every after few miles stood a village of shifting cultivators. In a certain hamlet lived a family. The peasant and his wife used to clear a jungle and sow seeds. They had a son. When the son

had become adult, the parents arranged his marriage. Now, leaving the responsibility of the household to the son and the daughter-in-law, the old parents started spending their time in devotional songs.

But after a few years, the young wife fell ill and died leaving behind her only daughter named Khumti. The peasant married for the second time. The second wife gave birth to a daughter, named Karmti. Khumti was envious. Karmti was tolerant.

The heavy work of cutting the jungles, burning, clearing, digging and sowing and bulding a small hut in the clearing would be done by the peasant and his wife. The villagers also helped one another in turn. Such was their collective consciousness in weal & woe.

The two teen-aged sisters had the pleasure of going to the field along with other boys and girls of the village. While going and coming back, they used to sing, gossip, narrate tales and joke. The mothers used to cook at dawn, offer the first meal to the young band at home in the morning and patch the second meal in a bundle of banana leaf.

One day in the morning Khumti and Karmti went together to the field. Their duty was to weed the unwanted grass, scare the wild birds & animals, and pluck some ripe vegetables. Karmti did all these jobs faithfully, but Khumti was lolling, loitering and devouring the fresh fruits & vegetables like cucumber, melon, lady's finger, etc. Khumti was least interested to fill the basket for the consumption of all. However, she was conscious to earn credit from the parents; so she demanded from Karmti some vegetables to be put in her basket and shown to the parents. Karmti first midly denied and afterwards flatly refused to give a portion of the collection. Because Karmti had not yeilded to pressure, Khumti became angry.

In the afternoon the two sisters were coming back home. Karmti was peddling with a basket almost full of vegetables. Khumti was walking and thinking, plotting

and devising. A big banyan tree stood by the side of a river; a swing was hanging from the tree. It was made by the boys. Khumti proposed to play in the swing to & fro. Karmti agreed and sat on the swing. Khumti was pulling & pushing at first gently and then violently. Losing the balance Karmti was tottering & trembling. She fell below to the river and sank. A big sheat-fish swallowed her.

Khumti came back home alone with the basket of Karmti. The parents asked about Karmti. Khumti replied that Karmti was bathing in the river and would be coming soon.

But the veteran grandparents became suspicious; they knew the character of Khumti. With a pretext of washing a dirty clothe, the grandmother went to the river; she sat on a stone and began to wash the clothe and to observe the situation. Soon she heard a shrill; she became alert; again the shrill came. Karmti made repeated appeal from the belly of the sheat-fish. Being sure, the grandmother shouted to the grandfather & others. They pulled the fish to the bank, cut it open and brought out the girl just alive.

Karmti narrowly escaped. It was like a rebirth. It was a serious shock. She narrated the whole episode. The character of Khumti was now completely exposed; she lost all credibility. All the villagers distrusted & disliked her. Words had failed. Her arogance, her rudeness made many enemies. In her despair, Khumti retired & sat in a corner and wept.

Khumti's father made a big basket, kept her inside the basket and closed it tightly. No body was allowed to rescue her. She was crying, weeping, painting and sobbing. The villagers came and saw her with squint eyes from a distance. She went on beating her forehead. But nobody dared to prevail upon the strong instruction of the father. It was only Karmti who would stealthily offer a little of food & water & that too rarely.

Imprisonment continued for a few days. All hopes of pardon were vanished. The heart-broken prisoner,

crushed by disillusionment, shut herself up and became almost a recluse. She had lost her mother; she had no sympathetic nursing; now she was alone, forlorn. Her eccentricity, her abnormal behaviour became very marked. She became a hater of human beings. Henceforth, she stopped to solicit any sympathy from the people; she looked up following the flight of the *Noâoi* birds. They were wild birds; they would never come close to man; they would not trust any man.

Khumti approached the *Noâoi* bird for support and sympathy. The birds took pity on her. They came in a flock and roosted on the branches of nearby trees and started offering feathers, bill, nail, etc. Now, Khumti turned into a bird, the *Noâoi* bird. She broke basket, came out and flew above. She became one of the flock of birds. The birds received and welcomed her. She angrily left for ever with a vow of never again seeing the face of the relatives!

The villagers came out of their respective huts & houses & looked up. Karmti earnestly requested; and tears rolled down her face. But Khumti remained adamant and blessed Karmti for her amiableness.

The birds soared higher & higher and took a long flight to some distant, unknown forest. Their honking was no longer heard.

26. Princess Phulkumari

There was once upon a time a king who had been ruling Tripura with Rângâmâti as his capital. The king had a beautiful & lovable daughter named Phulkumari. The king used to remain busy with administrative problems.

When Phulkumari was grown up, the king looked at her one day, and ordered to arrange her marriage soon. His councillors became busy to find out a suitable bridegroom. Through the police & other agencies, the whole kingdom was informed. At last, one handsome and brave youth was found. He rejoiced that he would get

such a beautiful princess. The youth was brave, but obstinate. The wedding was celebrated with great pomp & pleasure.

The royal palace was located on a hill on the north bank of the meandering river Gomati. About five miles to the south of the palace was the seat of the famous Tripureswari Mata mandir on a hill. In between the palace and the temple, a site was selected and a beautiful residential house & garden etc. were made for the princess & the son-in-law.

Things were going on happily with the new couple. And the king was facing problems & problems and waging battles. The soldiers of Tripura were pouring out their blood like water in the battlefields in the Meghna Valley. Here in the Meghna Valley, the fate of Tripura was decided many times. To commemorate a victory in such a fierce battle, the king decided to dig a large tank near the residence of the new couple.

A large number of labourers from Chittagong., Noakhali and other areas of the Meghna Valley were summoned and engaged during the winter season. The work had to be completed within the next January. Hundreds of labourers with their hoes were working, cutting & digging day & night. The king made magnificent preparations & costly arrangements for the food & lodging of the labourers. The tiny huts in temporary sheds huddled almost together in rows, thronged with diggers, wood-cutters, earth-cutters, cooks, suppliers of rice & vegetables. Their joyous jokes & conversations produced reverberations. It was a spectale of chivalry.

But those happy & chivalrous days were destined to a dramatic interruption. The straight boundary-lines of the large tank were to touch or rather to encroach a portion of the residence of Phulkumari. The son-in-law raised objection. The work was temporarily stopped. The supervisor informed the minister; the minister informed the king. The king had a mind to make a suitable

alternative house for the daughter; but the king was firm in his decision to dig the tank there. The son-in-law was informed accordingly.

The labourers obeyed the king's order and resumed the work in full speed. The labourers & diggers saw the son-in-law standing and went on cutting & dumping earth. When, therefore, the son-in-law had seen that there was no longer any hope of diverting the royal decision, he resolved to sit down on the spot and said: Bury me here, bury me here! Without much ado, he went down to the spot & sat down headlong. The labourers dumped earth over his body. He died then & there.

The son-in-law is dead -- was the voice of the diggers & labourers gathered round there. Phulkumari at once rushed to the palace. Overcome with grief and impatience, Phulkumari after acccusing her father, jumped into the water of the river Gomati and died there.

The mournful king ordered to complete the work and to name the village after the name of the princess.

27. The tragic fate of Nakha

In Tripura's eastern mountainous region where the density of population was thin, where hamlets were few and far between, where the wild beasts would growl and the birds would chirp and fly about the sky, the stature of the hills people was dwarfed by mountains, rivers, forests and wild animals.

In that region on a hill stood a hamlet inhabited by a few families of the famous Tripuri community. It was the only human settlement for miles around. In such a place very few people would remain out of doors after evening. The village foot-paths were narrow & zigzagged with ups and downs. There was a long stream adjacent to the hamlet and about one hundred feet below the hilltop. The stream had its origin to a very distant mountain.Those peasant families had their *jum* fields on hill-slopes all around the hamlet. The hamlet would be looked after by

a council of elders headed by a *Sardar*. The name of the *Sardar* was Chhamprai *Sardar*. His wife's name was Khulumti. The couple had a son named Naguray. Chhamprai *Sardar* was a capable & wise leader. Khulumti was a kind-hearted & steady woman. Naguray was bold & chivalric.

Like any other Tripuri village, this hamlet too had an *ojhai* (priest as well as physician). In case of any rite and ceremony, disease & death, his service was essential. The *ojhai* had his wife and a son and a daughter in his family.

During the rainy season, one day in the early morning Naguray went to the *jum*-field for weeding and nursing the plants & crops. After a few hours, Naguray's mother Khulumti went down to the river-*ghat* for fetching water. The river was flowing along a long gorge; on both sides cliffs rose like high walls. Suddenly, Khulumti saw something queer, odd and strange floating in the river. Immediately, she exclaimed and cried out and invoked Naguray. The son rushed to the spot and plunged into the water and came out with the body of a young girl. Quickening their pace, the mother and the son rescued the unconscious girl and placed her in the open *verandah* of their house and summoned the *ojhai*. The *ojhai* surveyed the body carefully and examined the pulse and opined that the girl was not yet dead; he administered certain herbal medicines and expressed a faint hope of her survival.

The neighbourhood was ringing with hue and cry. Khulumti watched the girl patiently. The morning wore on to noon, and noon to evening; but the girl did not open her eyes. Khulumti lay awake long hours that very night. The next day in the forenoon the girl opened her eyes and beheld before her an unknown assemblage of anxious villagers. Khulumti offered a quantity of liquid food. Slowly and steadily she was restored to her natural condition. Making some discreet inquiries, Khulumti came to know

the name of the girl : her name was Nakhapili. She was an orphan. She lost her parents while she had been a baby. Her uncle and aunt nurtured her.

Nakhapili (alias Bijali) was found to be quite smart, efficient and amiable girl. She was quite reserved in her conduct and obstruse in her mind. She became an asset to the new family. The *ojhai's* daughter Papti and Nakhapili were of the same age; they became friends. Papti assured that here Nakhapili would get food and shelter, compassion and friendliness. Khulumti had no daughter; so, she loved the girl like her own daughter. But the *Sardar* was anxious about the identity and any possible complexity; on his behalf a search was made, but no trace was forthcoming about the whereabouts of the girl. Khulumti was deadly against the idea of handing over the girl to the hand of her relatives. The *Sardar* submitted to the strong determination of Khulumti. She said : I do not want such a charming & capable girl leave us.

All these made the new home as delightful as the fullmoon night. Gentility of the *Sardar*, affection of Khulumti, magnanimity of Naguray, friendliness of Papti, apparently convinced Nakhapili about her safety and security here. Still she would sometime sit silent in solitude with heart heavy with sob & sigh. Now and then joy and sorrow would overcast her countenance. Khulumti's cooling words would have a soothing effect upon the mind of Nakhapili. One day Khulumti lay on the bed, propped up by a pillow behind her; Nakhapili lay with her head on the lap of Khulumti. Nakhapili went on narrating her tragic experiences : the death of her parents made her dejected. Her uncle and aunt looked after her. She had to perform most of the domestic chores. But the cruel aunt used to offer her a rotten & stale food; and to rebuke her at the slightest mistake. Nakhapili was, as if, encircled by thorny bushes and poisonous plants. Her inward torments were pitiable. So one day Nakhapili attempted to commit suicide. Khulumti tried

to make light of the sad experiences and to soothe her nightmarish sufferings. Still, there was need for Nakha to be careful & dutiful; others little knew the strain the situation put upon an orphan, destitute girl!

One day Nakha saw a half-dead unfledged nestling helplessly twitching in a puddle; she brought the tiny bird & nursed. But its death alterted Nakha! A foreshadow!

After the lapse of some months, Nakhapili got herself almost thoroughly adjusted with the new family. Nagu and Nakha never separated from the company of one another. They passed time as the two loving friends. The *Sardar* and his wife were happy to see the friendship. One day Khulumti bespoke to her husband : Hear me, what I tell you in good earnest; I like to arrange the marriage between Nagu and Nakha. I hope you will not raise any objection. The *Sardar* answered : I see neither any evil nor any good, of accepting your proposal; so you are at liberty to do as you like. But do not make any haste. The *Sardar,* who had been smoking tobacco & listening with a pleasant smile, was hesitant.

After this discussion, a few months rolled away. One day during the rainy season, the young boys & girls decided to go deep into the forest to collect wild vegetables and bamboo saplings (=*Muiya*). While proceeding in the early morning with packets of food, baskets and knife, they were frolicing, frisking, singing, gossiping, whispering, whistling, flirting and flipping. They were blooming with youthful vigour. Meanwhile, Papti passed a comment : See, see! Nakha seems to be very beautiful, as graceful as the goddess of grace. Nakha at once replied by singing out one couplet from *Yadu Kalija* with delicate melody. Those were moments of ecstasy for all of them. By a skillful distortion & manipulation words, Chatungray entertained the team. After a few hours of journey, they entered deep into the forest and started collecting vegetables. Nagu and Nakha too started gathering; they, however, maintained a little distance from each other.

Nakha went down to a spring and washed her hands. There, hearing a hissing sound, Nakha became alert & observant. She saw a python advancing towards her only to devour her. Instantly she retreated, cried out and rushed towards Nagu and sobblingly took refuge in the bosom of Nagu. Setting her aside, Nagu too advanced and with one sweep of his sharp, long curved, one-edged knife fatally crushed the snake. In response to Nakha's outcry all the members of the team rushed to the spot and cut the snake to pieces.

After the incident, the team started on the return journey. While coming back, the young boys and girls highly praised Nagu for his courage. Papti and Anjakti went a step further & commented : Such a fit of courage was the precondition of marriage; Naguda twice gave prove of his courage; Nakha should consider it seriously. Nakha pinched Anjakti. The incident became the common topic of discussion for a few days. Khulumti henceforth did not allow Nakha to go into the wild forest for gathering.

But that poignant moment epitomized a cooperative emotion in the minds of Nagu and Nakha. Her refuge in his bosom, her breath in his body filled his mind with a carnal sensation. Initially, Khulumti was essential to Nakha; and Nakha was essential to Khulumti. Now, Nakha was essential to Nagu; and Nagu was essential to Nakha. The two minds exquisitely coordinated. It was not utterable by speech. Prior to the incident, Nagu's emotional mind and rational mind worked in harmony. After the incident, the balance between emotional mind and rational mind was a little disturbed. So, Nagu one day made a verbal outburst of his emotion. Nakha graced it with a meaningful smile. Now, Nagu's eyes were shining with joy.

Khulumti was adamant to keep Nakha here as daughter-in-law. The hesitant *Sardar* made the last attempt of search; but no information was forthcoming. So, he yielded to the desire of his wife.

Meanwhile, seasons changed. The spring season was about to come. The *Sardar* and his wife, having decided to arrange the marraige, started discussion with the elderly persons. Having obtained their informal consent, the *Sardar* selected an auspicious date for formal discussion. It was the second half of *Magh* (=January-February). In the afternoon the villagers assembled and sat in four groups : the elderly males sat with the *Sardar*; the elderly females sat with Khulumti; the boys sat with Nagu; while the girls sat down around Nakha. It was the occassion of formal and final settlement of marriage proposal *(= Kak chungmani)*. It was an occasion of drinking, joking, betel-leaf chewing, duet, gossiping, friendly exchange of words about life & love between the boys and the girls. The resonance was pleasing to the ears of the elders. It would resemble the famous war of words between the two birds *(=Suk & Sari)* about the qualities of Krishna & Radha. Hours passed thus. It was quitting time. The villagers returned to their houses. All the boys including Nagu went to the bachelors' dormitory. The *Sardar* & his wife went to the bed. But Nakha in solitude sat silent and thoughtful: there was foul work afoot somewhere!

The months of *Magh* (Janaury-February) and *Falgun* (February-March) were supposed to be very favourable for celebrating the marriage ceremony.

Accordingly, arrangements were made in full swing to celebrate the ceremony. On a day of full moon, preferably in the *Godholi Lagna*, the young boys and girls were in eager expectation of seeing Nagu and Nakha in their bridal costume. So, they gladly did many things : collected vegetables, & banana leaves, bamboo and flowers, fetched water, decorated the bridal chamber, cooked food & curry, and swept the courtyard, etc. The *Achai* (=priest) and the elders supervised the work. The *Bhandari* (=store-keeper) was supplying all essential things.

On the auspicious day, streams of relatives and guests were coming in the hamlet. The hamlet was humming with activities, laughing, gossiping and betel leaf chewing and smoking. In the absence of the parents of Nakha, the *ojhai* & his wife assumed the role of the parents of Nakha. Decoration of the bride and the bridegroom was going on separately. The priest and his assistants were busy with the worship of *Lampra* deity. A team of middle-aged persons became busy in cooking. The whole atmosphere was surcharged with joy and enthusiasm. Every thing was in good condition.

Meanwhile, from a very distant hamlet a *Jumia* family came to attend the ceremony. The *Jumia*, his wife and their daughter Khumpoi travelled a long distance to attend the ceremony in the house of their distant relative. The *Sardar's* cousin sister was long ago married to the elder brother of this *Jumia*. The cousin sister died giving birth to a baby. The cousin sister's husband too died within a year. For nearly two decades social relations between the two families ceased to exist. Both sides remained away & aloof. But now getting an invitation from the *Sardar*, the *Jumia* decided to respond and renew the relations. The *Jumia* and his wife were given a hearty welcome with sweet words, drinking, betel leaf and fruits.

The *Jumia's* daughter went inside the house of the *Ojhai* to see the bride; she became a little surprised on seeing Nakha; but she told nothing there. She came back to her mother and whispered. The *Jumia's* wife was a villain-looking woman; she purposely strolled and walked into the *ojhai's* house to verify the secret news. Apparently innocently she surveyed the bride quite minutely and became sure about the identity of Nakha; she returned silently and whispered the news to the *Jumia;* walking casually like a spy, the truculent *Jumia* pushed through a crowd for confirmation. The three members (=*Jumia*, his wife, their daughter) had been so cunning that others could not even guess the motive of their movement. They

sat together and a wicked thought flashed through their minds. In their eyes, Nakha was no better than a *Chikaljuk*, a witch, a *Daini*, a *Rakshashi!* They decided to fish out of troubled water!

Now the *Jumia* wanted to know from the *Sardar* the whereabouts of Nakha; he asked many questions; he was a pert. The *Sardar* frankly and freely narrated the incidents: how his wife & son rescued the girl, how his wife's and the *ojhai's* treatment restored her to normal life, how a search was made to know her identity & ancestry, how Nakha'a amiable behaviour endeared her. After listening to the statement, the *Jumia* seriously commented : This marriage cannot be solemnised; Nakha is your cousin sister's daughter; Nakha's father was my elder brother; Nakha is your sister's daughter; Nagu and Nakha are brother and sister.

It was a bolt from the blue. The untimely disclosure stupfied the *Sardar*. After a while, he immediately summoned the *ojhai* and the village elders. It was a crisis; it demanded a solution. The elders sat to lay their heads together. Being summoned by the elders, the *Jumia* and his wife made an alternative suggestion : arrange marriage between Chadaray's son and the *Jumia's* daughter. The village elders submitted to the cunning proposal. The new proposal of marriage was accepted & followed half heartedly.

But the other side of the scene very pathetic. The shocking news electrified all. All the hopes were utterly damped. Khulumti sat to beat her forehead! Nagu threw away his bridal costume and lost the balance of his mind for sometime; he threw himself on his bed and tossed. Nakha, overwhelmed with grief, sat aghast and hid her face with her hands and set aside her bridal costume. The vilification and verbosity by the *Jumia's* wife against Nakha disconcerted most of the guardians and guests. Some of them leered & some of them taunted. The boys and girls were about to run amuck and to punch Nakha.

The *Jumia* family alone chuckled for being successful in cheating under the pretence of fair dealing.

Afternoon wore on to evening, and evening to night. It was again quitting time. The villagers retired to their homes. The guests were accommodated in different houses. They all slept heavily. Nakha had to leave the house of the *ojhai*; she sat alone in a corner of the courtyard. In remorse she realised the agony of the tragic mess the *Jumia* family made of her life. Tears rolled down her cheek. She again fell upon the thorns of life and vortex of domestic politics.

At dead of night Nagu silently came out of his room with his knife and a few pieces of clothe and woke Nakha, and convinced Nakha to elope with him immediately. They disappeared and vanished among the high hills and thick jungles. All that night they travelled. At dawn they took shelter near a spring of water. Nakha cleaned up her muddy legs. Their legs were aching. They encountered dangers.

Nagu went to an adjacent *Jum* and returned with a pile of fruits within half an hour. They attempted to get far away from the villagers. Walking was hazardous. They hid themselves there for the whole day. In the evening they resumed their journey. Thus, they alternately took rest and walked three nights and three days. On the morning of the fourth day they reached a far off place; they expected to live here an anonymous life. The place of their choice was a very high hill covered with thick forest. For about a week they had to live in an abandoned hut *(=gairing)* in an abandoned *jum* left fallow. They set to work clearing hillslope for cultivation. They started clearing a patch of the hilltop for building a hut. They perspired and suffered mosquito bites. For a few months Nagu had to walk a distance daily to work in others' field for food.

However, free from social ostracism, they happily passed here a considerable period of time as the two

loving friends. They dwelt away and apart from other men. They would avoid visiting anybody's house. So, nobody would know their whereabouts. Days and months rolled on. More than two years passed in that secluled, sylvan enviroment. The cool & calm atmosphere of the hilltop used to brace them up. They banked on the assumption that the long distance & hardship would be formidable obstacles to any search. But in Nagu's parental home the atmosphere was gloomy. The morbid mother could not, for a few days, take food for want of seeing the son. A search was made; the boys set forth to search all around; they moved up & down, here & there; but in vain. Slowly the tension was coming down. In Chadaray's family a young boy of a distant hamlet was doing his 'bride service.' After two years of service *(=jamai khata)* in the bride's house, the marriage was solemnised. Now, Papti with her husband was scheduled to go to her father-in-law's house. Papti's brother and his friends accompanied Papti. It was more than two days' journey on foot, they had to halt & take shelter in anybody's house on the way. On reaching the destination, Papti's brother took rest for a few days. In course of casual conversation with the new relatives, Papti's brother came to know that a new, young *Jumia* had been living on a distant hilltop for the last two years. His whereabouts were unknown. There were woods and steep hills in the midst. However, he was of reserved nature. There was no dog barking, no baby crying, no buzzing, no noise.Nagu's new place was very mountainous; here high peaks broke off abruptly into narrow, deep gorge; Nagu made a notched track along the slope of an adjacent cliff; Nakha had to haul in water from a spring far below; but the damp track would often render the footing slippery.

On getting even an inadequate information, Chatungray & his friends, out of a spirit of adventure, the next day set out for the wearisome journey and on nearing the hill saw a hut on the summit. They scanned

the area and saw a *Jum* field and a narrow path. While climbing up the hill, he loudly called out : Naguda! Naguda! look! whom have I brought to you! It was an uncanny surprise to Nagu & Nakha. Nagu & Nakha offered them cordial reception, and reminisced about the early days with the covillagers and talked about many familiar incidents. Nagu asked about the health of his parents. Chatungray passionately enticed Nagu to rejoin the people he had left. Nagu refused. The visitors left in the afternoon. Nakha sat alone and surmised an impending danger. Only Nagu was there to understand what Nakha had appraised, and to listen to her fears.

On returning back home, Papti's brother exploded the astonishing news. It was a great relief to Nagu's parents and covillagers. They excitedly demanded to know where Nagu was. Within a week, Nagu's parents and uncle, led by Chatungray, appeared there in the solitary, sylvan residence of Nagu & Nakha. From a little distance below Chatungray whispered : Naguda's hut is on the top of this hill. It was a pathetic and touching experience to see the meeting of those people who had not seen each other for the last two years under tragic circumstances. An emotional current passed among them.

Quickening her pace, Khulumti greeted the son with a hug and exclaimed with tears and cries : My dear Nagu! My dear Nagu! The *Sardar*, without losing patience with his son's escape, without raising any voice in disgust, said : Nagu! Why did you stay away so long? Your mother could not, for a few days, eat food, and sleep. You and Nakha should go back with us. Separate arrangements would be made for your marriage with a beautiful girl, and Nakha's marriage with another boy.

The pressure was personal & persistent. All suspected that Nakha was inauspicious, unlucky, a witch! They gave Nakha a very hard time, blaming, insulting and intimidating. Nakha grew silent; she offered fruits and water to all.

The pressure continued for hours. Both social and psychological pressure were put upon Nagu. Nagu remained reserved for hours. At last, he spoke out. He refused to wimp out. He stood defiantly and said : I shall stay with Nakha here.

Now all the anxiety and anger fell upon Nakha. All the elders grew very impatient and weary. Even though Khulumti was capable, she had a cruel and harsh side as well. With an aggressive grin, she devilishly fabricated the service rendered to Nakha. She swaggered and hurled insult after insult at Nakha. She attempted to bully Nakha into submitting to their proposal and said : You have seriously damaged our family. Is it good on your part?

Nakha sat bewildered, confused and shocked. She had to put up with bitter teasing and severe scorn from the elders. Nakha silently tolerated all the blames and kept on thinking about her fate.

Looking down sadly, Nakha said : Mother! for your service and sacrifice, I am grateful to you. For all the disaster I am responsible. Pardon me. You take back your son.

The sun went down the horizon. Suddenly a gust of wind accompanied by heavy rain, thunder & lightning stormed the hill. Nakha perceived the arrival of the fateful moment. Quickening her pace, Nakha climbed down the hut and weepingly moved toward a shadowy forest. Seeing that Nakha had left quickly for an unknown destiny, Nagu also followed her and cried out : Nakha! Nakha!

Nakha, while running, lamented : I have no mother, no father, no brother, no sister, no kinsmen. A dreadful disaster will soon happen to me. If you come with me, it will cost your life. You go back, go back!

Nagu assured : No harm will befall on you. I shall see to it. Nakha! I can even lay my life for you.

Nakha howled : I am unlucky. I am ill-fated.

Nagu replied : I will go with you, I will die with you.

Both of them broke into tears and jumped into a very deep & dark gorge. The cliffs & jungles echoed back their traumatic yell. The tragic fate followed her wherever she went. The heavy knife of fate schreeched down. There was scarcely any autumn or spring in Nakha's life. Wherever she looked, she saw only despair & depression.

Jamatia Folk-Tale

28. *Parameswar Baba* Garia's ritual-tale

Long, long ago in the interior hills of the eastern part of Tripura there was a big village of the shifting cultivators. There was a shifting cultivator named Laktâya in that village; his wife's name was Hâchukti. The couple had certain virtues like purity of heart, kindness, industriousness, sincerity, honesty & fellow-feeling. On that account, the villagers used to seek his aid & advice. The pious couple were held in high esteem by the neighbours.

Though married about a decade ago, the couple had no child. It tormented their minds. It appeared to be an anathema. The man who did not distress any living being, the man who did not plunder other's wealth, the man who was god-fearing, had not been blessed with a child! The neighbours had sympathy for the couple; the elderly villagers, particularly the women, while gossiping, made a few suggestions. The husband asked: Then what is fit to be done? The elders replied: Adopt a son. Accordingly, on an auspicious day, with the consent of the village chief and the priest, a poor neighbour's son was duly adopted.

The couple though having no son during the earlier years of married life, were now happy to have a son; the couple started nursing, caring, loving and feeding the son with genuine affection. They would often hug the son lovingly & protectingly. Thus a good fortune came to the family in the form of the son. It was indeed a happy fate that an orphan child was brought to the warm hearts

& loving arms of the couple who soon loved the boy as dearly as their own little one.

But those happy days were destined to a dramatic interruption. Their hope crushed. The son fell ill and died after three years. The couple mourned at the death of their dear son. They tried their best to cure the boy: the *ojhai* sacrificed a hen, uttered spells and prayed to the deities. They grew weary of the son; they became quite indifferent to their health, food, rest & homework. They used to sigh deeply. Despair took possession of their hearts.

With troubled minds, they spent about seven years, seeking a son from Brahma by the pure penances of an ascetic practised as an old tradition throughout the length and breadth of Bharat. After seven years of penance (= *Tapashyâ*), Brahma became pleased and revealed himself in a dream and blessed the couple and said: I myself shall soon come as your son, and after another three years two daughters will be born to your family.

Now, they were overjoyed. The dream revealation became true. A divine son was born within a year, and after three years, the twin daughters were also born. The divine son was nick-named Gariyâ and the twins were named Mailungti and Khulungti.

Right from his childhood, the boy was cheerful & mirthful, helpful & honest. He was never found to quarrel with others or to cheat others. Endowed with certain divine qualities, he was the leader of the children, and dear to all the villagers. His personal character was an ideal one. Admiration for his noble character continued to grow.

There was, however, one problem. The backbone of the boy was unusually stiff and inflexible. For that reason, some people used to call him Siyong Kaurak; and his parents addressed him as Nrisingha. In course of time, Narsingha was abbreviated to Nrisingha. Nrisingha was the protector

of *Bhakta* Prahlad and the punisher of Hiranya Kasipo; Hiranya Kasipo was a devil and a hater of Hari.

Year after year rolled on. The boy gradually grew into a handsome youngman. The elderly people were there to discuss casually about the marriage of Nrisingha. There were also several romantic adventures, hunting down this young man to their own passions & purpose. His parents also tried to make him indulge in worldly pleasures.

Without knowing the real identity of the young man, the parents went on insisting repeatedly. Day in and day out, the pressure came from various corners. The two young sisters too implored him to be married. But the young man set aside all requests and pressures. The parents and all other neighbours were planning tricks after tricks to convince the young man. At last, he submitted to the pressure and persuasion.

It was a great relief to the parents. It soon became a common topic of general discussion. One after another, all the elders of the village thronged usually in the evening in the house of the parents, and the elders were found very active & jubilant in arranging the marriage. Usually, traditionally, the groom's parents had to proceed through a go-between and duly approach the bride's parents with some presents. But here, the custom was reversed. The bride's parents started proposing and approaching. It did not, however, take long time to select a bride. And amid much jubilation, the nuptials were duly celebrated.

The new bride was healthy & handsome, brimful of love & affection. Such a bride usually & naturally had a desire to enjoy her youth. But the groom did not do all that man could do to be good husband. So, after a few months, the bride's side complained. The delicate issue was amicably settled by the village council; divorce was granted.

The parents again arranged a marriage with a

beautiful damsel. After a few months, the second bride too became disgusted, and divorce followed. Thus, the parents arranged marriage for another five times. And divorce too followed for those times. The names of the brides were: Afuti, Nafuti, Kufuti, Kuchangti & Karmati. The stories of marraige, maladjustment, unhappiness and divorce soon became the topic of discussion & whispering. In derision, the villagers called him **Garaya**. The literal meaning of **Garaya** was maladjustment.

The parents, in their earnestness for the welfare of their son, made the seventh attempt. They invited the village elders before the marriage; and after a discussion they hit upon a new plan & took a resolution on celebrating a great festivity. The seventh marriage was not at all solemnised. The festival was preliminary to the nuptials. The underlying motive was to excite passion, an ardent desire, to make him prolific and this-worldly.

The bold decision precipitated a week-long festival right from the *Visuva Sankranti*, also known as *Chaitra Sankranti*. It was a time of merry-making, dancing, singing, joking, frolicking, feasting, gift-giving, drinking, visiting & fellow-feeling. The particular emphasis was on dance, drinks, song and lavish hospitality which were the symbols of youth, conjugal life and prolificity. The festival continued upto the 6th day of *Vaisakha*.

The introduction of the festival to other villages and parts of Tripura passed over steadily. Once again, the parents were hopeful of the success of the design. The son was expected to practise the duties of a householder.

But in a dramatic fashion came a startling announcement made by the son on the seventh day of *Vaisâkha*. Waking at early dawn, his mind fully made up, he announced his burning desire to take the vow of an ascetic, of leaving the hearth & home, of becoming a wandering hermit. The boy's decision of resigning all his responsibility and giving away all his personal possessions shocked the parents and the villagers. But it was a

genuine desire of world-renunciation, an indication of his integrity & devotion.

Reluctant to become entangled in the worldly affairs again, he, however, gave blessings and responsibilities to his wife and sisters. His wife Kucangti was made the guardian deity of water, and as such she would be known as **Tui Bukmâ**. His first sister Mailungti was made the guardian deity of paddy & rice, and as such she would be known as **Mailuma**. His second sister Khulungti was made the guardian deity of cotton, and as such she would be known as **Khuluma**.

The young man had an intimate friend, named Takchâk-fâ. With dogged tenacity, Takchâk-fâ persuaded the young man to disclose his true identity. Unable to resist the ardent appeal, the young man disclosed his true identity and preached a serious sermon in brief. The preaching had three significant but major headings:

Ker

The inner meaning of the term *Ker* was self-control, non-injury, forgiveness & purity; purity in body, purity in mind & purity in speech. An integrity of character should be the motto. To remain incorruptible, one should ward off evil forces. Creative energy should be pure.

Kauthaya

The inner meaning of the term *Kauthaya* was self-surrender and self-realisation; a rational control of impulses, feelings, demands & desires. It involves self-examination. It involves penance to rise above the lower self to the level of the social self.

Kaubaya

The inner meaning of the term *Kaubaya* was steadfastness to truth. Truthfulness is the essential trait of the ideal self. Truth triumps ultimately. An attempt at extinction of demands & desires, impoverishes a life. So, not extinction, but rational control of demands & desires, should be the ideal of life.

As the young man's parents, friends & villagers were alive, it weighed heavily upon them to bid him farewell. But he resolved to quit all his parents, wife, sisters & friends and to tear himself away from home.

Riang Folk-Tales

29. Adventures of Solong Jabriha

Once upon a time lived a young man named Solong Jâbrihâ, who was matchless in courage and strength. While he was child he lost his father. The chief of his village was notorious and envious of this family, because Solong's father would protest against any injustice of the chief. So, his mother along with his son shifted elsewhere. After a few years she too died leaving her only son alone. His parents were devout saivites. The Lord Siva took pity on the orphan and offered him a knife.

Overwhelmed with grief, Solong set out from home and sauntered here and there aimlessly. On the way he met an unusually tall young man named Jâti Klahâ. They became friends. They strolled together and met another young man named Khându Bâlinghâ whose ears were very big like those of an elephant. They became friends. They walked together and met another young man called Jâti Hakcungha, who could ignite fire simply by rubbing his legs. They became friends. They all set out together and met yet another young man named a Japa Klahâ, whose hands were abnormally long. He too became friend. They all rollicked along. They tend to emphasize and display their masculinity in speech, manner and gesture. They have all their adventures in common.

Aimless and homeless, these five friends went deep into forest and climbed up high where there was no human settlement. To their astonishment a shanty on that hill was found. It was the abode of an old wicked witch. She had no food, fuel and fire. They distributed work among themselves. Jâti Klaha started begging for rice; Japa Klahâ with his long hands collected wild vegetables and fuel. Jâti Hakcungha ignited fire. Khându Bâlinghâ cooled them all with his big ears. Solong Jâbrihâ cut and collected green bamboo pipes to be used as cooking

pots. Thus, the five friends collected the essential materials for the preparation of food. The witch cooked and served the meal. At dead of night while they were asleep, she killed four of them and sucked their blood. Solong was spared. Early in the morning he found his friends dead. With his knife, Solong brought them back to life. Out of anger the young men urinated so much that the hut and the witch were inundated. The friends left the place and again wandered.

On their way they found a big banyan tree which had five trunks. They took shelter there for the night. Next morning as usual the four friends went out in search of food and fuel. Solong did not go; he climbed down and was waiting for his fellows. He was, as if, keeping the house. Meanwhile an old man with his daughter was passing by that path. He was going to the house of his relatives. The girl was a paragon of beauty. They met Solong and talked to him. They came to know each other's whereabouts. Solong and the girl became attracted to each other. There in the sylvan environment marriage was performed in an unceremonious way in presence of the friends. A small feast was also arranged. After that, Solong's father-in-law returned home.

Then the newly married couple and their friends happily lived there for some time. They built a hut and lived on hunting and gathering. Solong's wife became the mistress of the house. All passersby and woodcutters would take rest there and get water and fruits from the beautiful lady. Thus, her name and fame spread and reached the palace of the kingdom. It aroused the passion of the king, who wanted her hand by any means; the aberrant king conspired with his henchman. He had contacted some abductors, who suggested the name of the witch. The old wicked witch came to abet and assured to kidnap the beautiful lady.

Hard times came for Solong. The witch played tricks. She assumed the form of an innocent girl, visited the

hut of Solong, talked to the inmates and thus became friendly. One day she took some poisonous cakes for them. Solong touched the cakes with his magic knife and then ate. So they did not die. As the poison had become ineffective, the witch grew more curious. She went on visiting them, offering fruits and showing sympathy for their wretched condition. Thus, she won the confidence of Solong's wife. One day Solong's wife confided. The witch came to know the magic power hidden in the god-gifted knife.

The witch was waiting for the opportune moment and kept the family on observation. She used to visit them while the friends were absent. One day in the morning during winter Solong, his wife and the witch were sitting near a fire, warming themselves and gossiping. While Solong was inattentive, all of a sudden, the witch grabbed the knife and at once put it into the fire. Immediately Solong became senseless and fell flat. Solong's wife was at once kidnapped and taken to the palace to the great sensuous pleasure of the king, who amply rewarded the witch.

The unbearable incident occurred during the absence of the four friends. While retuning and approaching home, they first saw the main trunk of the banyan tree dry. It was an omen. They entered into the house and found their best friend dead. The corpse was left on the floor. The magic power of the knife was known to them. So they searched every nook and corner and scrabbed about for the knife, and at last found it inside the ashes. At the very touch of the knife, Solong revived and narrated what had happened, much to everybody's astonishment and anger.

Determined to take revenge and also to rescue the lady, they left the place lest the king's agents might endanger their lives further. The condition of the poor lady was like Sitâ. The lascivious king was like Râvana. The five friends worshipped Mahâdeva for blessings and

made friendship with the subjects who too were disgusted with the king for being utterly destitute of morality and conscience.

In a terrible war between the two forces, the notorious king was defeated and killed. The lady was rescued. The subjects captured the palace and released all such ladies, girls and captives. After a great rejoicing, Solong was made king and his friends ministers of the kingdom. Subsequently the absconding witch was detected and killed. In course of time, some corrupt village leaders were also taken to task. The king and the queen made arrangement for the marriage of the ministers. The distressed subjects too henceforth lived happily.

Motifs

This is a Riâng folk-tale collected from Kâthâl Chhari in Tripurâ (south). It reflects the influence of the *Râmâyana* and the *Mahâbhârata*. It has a number of motifs, such as:

1. Successful orphan, Solong Jâbriha.
2. reward for service of God Siva who offered a knife.
3. jealous village headman.
4. unusual heroism of the friends.
5. blood-thirsty and greedy witch.
6. magical power of the god-gifted knife.
7. falling in love and marriage.
8. physical transformation of the witch into a lass.
9. banyan tree in service of man.
10. resuscitation of four friends and Solong Jabriha.
11. revengeful friends.
12. punishment of the king & the witch for misdeeds.

30. The hen & the wild cat

There was a hen. Only the other day, the hen laid egg. The hen had to sit on egg to hatch. But the hen could not afford to spend a long time for incubation. The hen had to glean foodgrains by moving here and there, and by scratching.

One day the hen went away in search of food. It was noon, about twelve o'clock. The hungry hen found it difficult to get foodgrains. Meanwhile, one wild cat was conspiring to devour the hen. The wild cat made several unsuccessful attempts of ambuscade. The cat lay hidden in jungles to attack the hen in surprise. To-day the cat got the scope. The cat had to lie in wait, and sneaked and then impetuously rushed & pounced upon the hen and devoured the meat. Eating the meat delightedly, the cat thought: I must take rest & lie down for a happy sleep. There was a worn-out hut in the midst of a fallow farmland. There the cat lay, curled and fell sound asleep.

The egg was in a very depressed state of mind. The egg was bewailing. But the egg did not break down. The egg determined to punish the killer. The hen's faecal matter was at no great distance; it was in the neighbourhood. The egg and the faecal matter became fumed with anger, and after a serious discussion, implored their friends. A bamboo split was their friend. They said to the bamboo split: Our mother has been killed by a wild cat. We do not want to afflict you with our troubles. We seek your advice. The bamboo split said: I must help you. I have a snake as my friend. I like to take the snake along with us; how will it be? Do you agree? They said: Oh! yes, yes! The snake came and proposed to invite its friend, hornet, to take part in the expedition. The hornet flew into a rage on hearing the sad news and readily joined the team and proposed to invite its friend, a basket (= *Brâ= orâ = tukri*). The basket came forward and proposed to invite its friend, a tall tree (=*Mung-Khung*).

Thus, the team consisted of seven friends. The team was best suited to the occasion and the mood. The expedition led by the egg at last reached the destination where the cat had been asleep. They had to lie in wait so as to command a view of the cat. The faecal matter seated itself near the claws of the cat. The sharp bamboo split stood close to the back-side of the cat. The egg

entered into the hearth. The hornet took shelter into a gourd calabash which had been in use for holding drinking water. The snake was waiting behind the door. The tree took its position near the staired trunk of tree (= *Yâklai*) used for ascending & discending.

Within a short time, they had the satisfaction of seeing the cat awaked. The faecal matter was near to the claws. The cat bent its claws backward & forward. The claws became wet & dirty by dragging along the faecal matter. The faecal matter stank & diffused very bad smell. With a sense of uneasiness, the cat rubbed its claws. Blood was oozing out. The confused cat went to ignite the hearth, From the ignited hearth the egg burst forth its morbid matter. The morbid matter spoiled the face & eyes of the cat. The cat's embarrassment now increased extremely. The cat struggled to wash the face & eyes with water from the calabash. The hornet was there to sting. It caused acute pain. In a confused hurry, the cat stepped out of the hut (= *tang-ghar*) with diminished vision. The snake was there near the threshold. The snake was there to bite. The cat cried out: I am doomed. I am doomed. A snake has bitten me! The cat was stepping down. The basket now took the opportunity to cuff on the head of the cat. Unable to bear the acute pain, the cat trembled in fear and tumbled down and fell near the tree. The tree was ready for the ultimate assault: with one sweep killed the cat.

31. Tit for tat

Long ago, a Riang family of Tripura cleared a patch of forest during the early winter season in November-December, and burnt the bushes and sowed seeds and built a hut in the clearing.

The hut swarmed with domestic animals & birds. In that hut a hen and a cat lived in great friendship. The hen had a number of chicken. The cat too had several children. There was considerable fellow-feeling even among the two sets of children.

Time rolled on. Then came the winter season; it was the time of consuming sweet cakes. One day the chickens wanted to eat cakes; they repeatedly requested the hen to prepare cakes. The hen sat silent, wrapped in thought. It was difficult to collect the costly materials: rice powder, banana, cocoanut, sugar, oil, and utensils. Only the rich people can afford it!

At last out of motherly affection, the hen humbly approached the housewife of the Riang family. The housewife was kind enough to donate all the necessary materials. The hen came back glibly & happily with the materials, and then started cooking cakes. The chickens were in a jubilant mood. They too rose early and sat and enjoyed the pleasure of the family hearth.

In the meantime, the cat got the smell and glibly walked inside the kitchen of the hen. After the preliminary discussion, the hen, out of courtesy, allowed the cat to share the dish of cakes. The cat said: My children also importuned and asked me to prepare cakes. But I am idle. I did not prepare. If you kindly permit me, I shall send my children to you. The hen mildly consented.

The cat went back home and spoke a lot about the sweetness of the cakes. The cat was cunning to obtain permission for her children also and directed them to hurry.

Meanwhile, the chickens had devoured all the tasteful and fresh cakes. When the children of the cat came, there had been not a single cake left. But the calves became crazy; they begged. It was not a matter of joke to collect those materials again and make cakes immediately. The hen, however, welcomed the little guests and offered them seat and prepared cakes with dung of swine. The calves felt the pinch of hunger, but could not relish the new cakes. The new cakes were bitter in taste.

The calves sullenly returned home and vomitted and narrated the news of step-motherly behaviour of the hen;

on hearing this, the cat became revengeful and determined to kill the chickens.

After a few days, when the excitement subsided, the crafty cat pretending to forget & forgive the past, strolled and visited the residence of the hen and purposely started gossiping in a casual manner with the intention of knowing the place of their sleep. The hen behaved normally and showed the places. The cat came not for a soiree, but for a survey.

But from that very night the hen became cautious, and suspected the cat. The hen saw a change in the cat. A danger was dogging her footsteps. She used to close the door carefully and change the place of their sleep lest a criminal should enter the room. The visits of the two friends became infrequent, their conversation had no spontaneity, no emotion.

Midnight came; and now within an hour the deed would be accomplished. The cat moved surreptitiously and infiltrated into the room of the hen. The hen & the chickens had taken refuge inside a vertical drum. It was beyond the reach of the cat. So the cat found the bed empty and started searching here & there. The cat halted for a moment near the drum and heard a low voice. The hen was whispering. The furious cat, stung to madness by a sense of anger, was ready for action. The cat's eyes were glittering. The cat challenged the hen. The hen found herself confronted by an adversary more powerful than herself.

The hen, roused and summoned by the challenge, did not come out hastily. The hen had taken a few calculated steps. The hen hid a stale egg under a heap of ashes in the hearth. The hen said: Friend! I shall hand over the chickens one after another. You roast each chicken and then relish. You ignite the hearth first of all.

The bad-tempered cat had no time to pause and ponder. The cat tried to drive air into the hearth with

hasty and speedy blows. The fire got ignited and the egg blasted. The blast tarnished the face & eyes of the cat. The cat thwartingly sought the advice of the hen. The hen directed the cat to wash the face with water preserved in a large earthen vat (= *Gâmlâ*). There were several catfishes (= *Singhmâch*) in the vat. The moment the cat had dipped the soiled face, the catfishes got disturbed and inflicted poisonous wounds into the soiled face and eyes.

The frustrated cat again sought the advice of the hen. The hen directed the cat to rub the face against the fence. The fence was made of sharp splits of bamboo. The rubbing became fatal. The cat was bleeding from many wounds. The cat fled and died on the way.

The hen & the chickens slept for sometime. Dawn came. The hen emerged with her chickens out of the drum and found the cat lying dead by the roadside.

Noatia Folk-Tales

32. The drought & the Swine

Tripura, a small & mountainous kingdom, was long ago afflicted with a severe drought. In those days, Tripura had herds of elephants & deers & troops of monkeys; and there were numerous birds & insects. There were dark places where the sunrays could not penetrate.

One day one thirsty swine was digging & grubbing some arum roots with the muzzle. The swine was named *Oâkjar-phâ*. It was a hill- slope, dark & cool. Unexpectedly, water oozed out. The swine struggled to make the pit deep and big. The swine drank gladly. The swine prudently engaged one wild bird, named *Takkrumâ (=Mathurâ)*, to protect the pool of water.

The weather was hot & bad. The sun was bright in the sky and the warmth of it was scorching; the hours around noon were very hot. The wild beasts were

searching and moving here & there for water; they came here and sought the permission of *Takkrumâ*; *Takkruma* said: My duty is to protect & preserve the water. I cannot allow you to drink. It is not in my power to grant your request. The owner is *Oâkjar-phâ*. Without his permission, you can not drink. If you trespass, you will have to face serious consequences; it may ensue quarrel, scuffle and even battle.

One day one thirsty deer, being prohibited from drinking the water, stood & leered with the lovely eyes and then asked: How much big & powerful is your lord? The guard was eloquent in praise of the swine. The guard said: My lord has a corpulent body with broad shoulders, a powerful chest, strong hands and legs, long furs, big eyes, incisive teeth & bold head. The deer gave another look and retreated in the face of danger. The next day, there came a monkey. Being forbidden, the monkey asked a few questions about the owner of the water. Getting the reply, the monkey screamed and jumped away. For days together, the guard encountered many thirsty animals and birds, and successfully convinced them not to touch the water. He told how strong & brave his lord was!

At last, there appeared the king of that forest: the tiger. The thirsty tiger was obstinate. The guard warned and gave a description of the strength of the swine. The tiger had prowess to be conceited about. To confute the claim of the guard, the tiger gave a description of his own strength, and then asked: Do your lord possess beard? The guard asked: What purpose will the beard serve? The tiger then stroked his beard with a composed and dignified gesture and proceeded to drink water. The tiger satisfactorily drank and emptied the pool completely.

The poor guard rushed and informed the swine. I must punish the trespasser, said the swine. The swine gruntingly hurried to the pool; the guard followed. Being challenged, the swine became very aggressive. It was

hard to keep silent when the owner was bubbling over with anger. The owner pounced upon the trespasser. They rushed on each other and hewed each other down; they struck each other, leaping, growling, shrieking, grunting, charging, racing through the jungles & bushes.

A terrific eerie had taken hold the locality, and the birds and animals ran swiftly to their nests & caves. Even the guard paid no heed to the battle-cry of the lord, and rushed away in safe distance.

The battle raged till the next day. Sometimes, the swine was driven back in disorder, and then again the tiger was driven back in disorder. At last, the tiger fell dead. But the swine was also seriously wounded; the wound bled much; the swine was not healed of his wound. The swine too died.

Now, it so was that the guard had not heard the din & the cry of the battle, for both the combatants had already breathed their last. The guard's heart was pierced with pity & sorrow! The guard slowly & cautiously came forward. The pool was converted into a slush of mud. The mangled dead bodies lay there. Disorder spoke of a terrible struggle.

The guard got angry with the peccant tiger. The guard did never eat the meat of tiger. A scope now came unexpectedly. For about three days, the guard went on eating the carrion. Soon the symptoms of indigestion were manifested. Because of overeating, the body could not cope with the surplus. A clogging of the whole system took place. About a week after, it put out the flame of life of the guard. At that time, a sudden blast of wind blew; with the gust came a sharp bamboo-split; like a dagger, the split pierced into the belly of the gourmand guard: It accelerated the process of death. The guard fell down shrieking & died.

There was a clump of bomboos at that place. A big rat suddenly heard the peculiar sound of shrieking by the guard. Out of curiosity, the rat came out to enquire, and saw three dead bodies.

The veteran rat had the knowledge of making a flute out of tarsus. The selfish rat was in the look out for tarsus. Now, the rat cut off one tarsus and took pains to prepare a musical pipe. A flute is usually a cylindrical tube made of bamboo or wood; it is a wind instrument with holes & keys to be sounded by breathe stream across the mouth hole. The rat was an expert flute player. The rat, while playing with the flute, would sink into a state of leisurely rhythm.

High in the branches of a big tree there was the residence of a monkey. The sweet note of the flute attracted the attention of the monkey. The monkey used to pay attention to the melodious sound. One day the monkey descended down the hill and reached the place of the rat. The concordance gave pleasure to both; the rat was happy to see in the monkey a connoisseur. The monkey would visit daily & sit at ease and appreciate the art of the rat and prattle.

Meanwhile, the monkey hit upon a way to plunder the flute. The monkey collected a quantity of gum from certain trees & plants, and sat by the side of the rat. While the rat had been in a mood of ecstasy with diminished consciousness, the cunning monkey smeared the sticky gum over the eyes of the rat. Leaving the rat almost blind, the monkey hurriedly decamped with the flute.

The rat, being cheated, was shocked. The disappointment shocked the rat terribly. The rat lay in the frenzy of sorrow for sometime. The rat, sitting down alone for a while, attempted to grope; broken scream came every now & then. One woodpecker bird was perching and searching termite hidden under bark of trees. The rat heard the voice of the bird and sought the bird's help. The bird swooped down and removed the gum. The animal soon recovered from the temporary problem. Then the rat said: One monkey used to come here being attracted by the sweet note of my flute. Contrary to my

expectation, the monkey smeared gum on my eyes and plundered my flute. The rat sought the woodpecker's help to get back the flute.

The careful woodpecker assured to help the rat, but did not dare to cope with the naughty monkey directly, and so devised an alternative plan; the woodpecker made an appeal to the king of birds. The king of birds became kind enough to pay a visit to the rat. The rat's hospitality, humility & earnestness impressed the king of birds (= *Takshi-raj*).

The king of birds wanted to know the whereabouts of the thief. The rat failed to furnish any definite information, but guessed that it would be towards the eastern hills. The king of birds flew eastward till the king reached the residence of the shrewd & selfish monkey. The cheat was then playing with the flute. Upon finding the flute in the custody of the cheat, the king became calm & quiet, concealing the disgust at the meanness of the cheat. The king said: I sit quietly at a long distance and I am patiently listening to the sweet sound. Your tune is melodious. It is irresistible. So I have come to meet the expert player and to enjoy the tune. How good you are, dear monkey!

It was a delicate flattery deliberately committed by the king. Nevertheless, the compliment was very pleasing to the monkey. The monkey offered the king hospitality and invited the other monkeys. They all praised the masterly style of the monkey. The buoyant artist went on playing the flute before a cheerful audience. The king now said: My dear friend! I could not play a flute; will you be kind enough to give me a chance? The monkey nodded assent and handed over the flute to the king. The king played the flute. All the monkeys were wonder-struck at the skill of the king. Enjoying the melody, the monkey requested the king to continue. The king said: As a bird, I am accustomed to perch on a tree or on something like that; if you allow me to sit alone on the

open back balcony (= *verandah*) for playing the flute, my performance will produce hypnotic sleep in you. The monkey replied: If I allow you to sit there, you may fly off with the flute! So, I cannot allow you.
The king wondering at the refusal, leered and said: If you do not believe me, you may grease my tail with oil and hold on the tail. All the monkeys nodded assent; so the monkey agreed and arranged to grease the tail. The monkey and the retinue grasped the tail. Being an artist of some honour & reputation, the monkey did not question further, and assumed that the king of birds must have magnanimity.

Now, the king clearly perceived that he got a scope to deceive the monkey. Quite content with the arrangement, the king so successfully displayed the skill that all the monkeys fell deep asleep. The grasp became loose. The king flew off with the flute and reached the residence of the rat and handed over the flute to the rat.

Lushai Folk-Tales

33. Origin of the Tui-chong stream

In a Lushai family there were two sisters, named Tui-chong and Nuengi. They were orphans. They had to eke out their living by fishing, gathering, shifting cultivation and weaving. Like their neighbours, the two sisters would carry their food to the field & eat it at mid-day. They had to walk to the far end of the forest and come back daily, struggling along with forehead-suspended heavy loads in bamboo basket up the precipitous slope to their hill-top hut.

One year there was no rain. The streams and springs became dry. It was the summer season. The two sisters went to the forest. It was mid-day. They took their meal. But there was no water. The younger sister fell very, very thirsty; she insisted on getting water. The elder sister assured her to bring water from a distant village.

But Nuengi became impatient to have water here & now. Tui-chong came to stand beside her and caress her with rather motherly affection. Nuengi became impulsive to Tui-chong's plea. Nuengi said: If I do not get water, I shall die; then you will be useless to me. I prefer water to your life.

Tui-chong shook her head slowly & painfully. She said: In all the years you have roamed this forest; have you seen any pool of water in the vicinity?
Tui-chong neither expected nor wanted an answer to the question. Her eyes observed Nuengi's face for a moment. With her will-force, Tui-chong transformed herself into a river to quench the thirst of her sister.

Nuengi drank water, but lost her sister. Realising her folly, Nuengi sat aghast near the river. An uneasy murmur ran around the forest. Her agony was plainly visible. The night was approaching. That night, she lay hidden inside the hollow cavity of a big tree, & she plunged into sleep the moment she lay down, deaf to the screaming. In the next morning coming out of the cavity, & looking around, & feeling safe, & lying on a bed of leaves & grass, she was suffering from hunger. It was a lonely place, full of jungles. The only sounds she was hearing were those of birds and insects.

The new, weary river was meandering south-westward, through hills & gorges to meet the famous Karnaphuli River. Landslides, soil, clay & rotten leaves were whirling down-stream in its swift waters. Far down, where it met the famous Karnaphuli River, there was a prosperous settlement of the Bengali people. The Bengalees had a local king there. The subjects and the king were surprised to see a new river. The king made discussion with his ministers and sent a team of adventurous, young men. They walked, tripped, stumbled to go deeper & deeper into forest along the river. A few days of tedious walk through leech-infested jungle of the hill tract of Chittagong brought them to the source of

the new river. A sound was heard. They kept going on, closer & closer, and finally saw a young girl weeping. Nuengi had never seen those men before. She sprang up there wild-eyed. A smile of welcome evoked a similar response simultaneously & spontaneously. They rescued her and took to the court of their king.

The king was enjoying the pleasures of the kingdom along with his queen. The queen was his wedded & beloved wife. But the queen was barren. Now, in course of time, Nuengi gave birth to a son. The wedded queen became jealous, and apprehensive of the promotion of Nuengi. Nobody dared to give the good news to the king. The baby was immediately thrown into the new river. Nuengi was given a false information about the baby. Nuengi wondered vaguely.

But in spite of her transformation, the elder sister did not forget the younger sister. Tui-chong rescued and saved the baby. Nuengi subsequently gave birth to six more children one after another. The jealous queen contrived skilfully to throw all the children into the new river. Fortunately, Tui-chong was there in the water to protect the children in her abode in the water.

Tui-chong used to nurse the chidren, feed them, teach them and tell them the stories of the previous life, the stories of their mother, the stories of the king & the queen of Chittagong. Time rushed onward like the new river. The children were now grown up youths. They became curious to see their mother and the king. Tui-chong encouraged and blessed them and showed the way.

One day the seven young brothers emerged out of water and confidently strolled towards the palace. The seven brothers soon reached the destination and started dancing and singing. It soon attracted a large audience. The spectators, being astonished, were talking among themselves. The dramatic narration created a sensation. The hubbub went on increasing.

The king came out of his palace and saw the

handsome children and asked about their whereabouts.
The children said: *Maharaj!* we are your children.
The king said: You are liars. Liars are given severe punishment.
The children said: Nuengi is our mother. Your queen contrived to throw us into the new river. Tui-chong saved us there.

The king ordered to bring Nuengi there for identification. The children showed respect; Nuengi caressed them with motherly affection and desperately disclosed the incident.

The king wrathfully ordered the executioner to behead the wicked and jealous queen. Henceforth, Nuengi and her chidren were given due recognition and love.

History occassionally links some famous men with some rivers. Here, a Lushai girl's name is associated with a river. Hence, the stream is known as Tui-chong. The stream keeps alive the tragedy of the past. The Tripuri community also have a similar story.

34. The terrible Python

In the north-eastern corner of hilly Tripura, there was a village which had only the Lushai families living there. The villagers were then preliterates, and shifting cultivation was their main occupation. The village swarmed with domestic animals and birds.

There was a famous cave near that village. A large & long snake, python, lived in the cave. The snake was very fierce, selfish, voracious. The villagers were afraid of the snake. The snake was a demon. The snake had devoured many animals and birds.

The villagers were in great distress and fear. Because of the snake's depredations, the village council sat together and made a decision: each family, in turn, would send food, demestic bird or animal or even a man daily to the snake in the cave.

Days went by and the villagers became forlorn and weary. It was a drainage of their resources. One day the turn came to the village chief's family. The members of the family were in great anxiety.

Suddenly & surprisingly a young traveller reached there. He was very strong, healthy and courageous. Evening came. The tired traveller sought shelter. According to the local custom, for such a helf, the village chief must be approached. The villagers indicated the house of the chief. The chief was pleased with the charming personality of the traveller and offered him shelter.

The chief had his wife and children. They made arrangement for the traveller's food. They offered uncooked rice, vegetables, pots, firewood. The traveller was to cook for himself. While cooking, he started narrating the experience of his journey. But his observant eyes perceived a note of melancholy in the minds of all the members of the chief's family. He stopped his own story and asked about their condition. He persistently enquired and learned the tragic story. The chief was scheduled to send his young, beautiful daughter to the snake.

The young man laughed and assured them to sleep in peace. He immediately volunteered to go to the snake next morning. It was a great, great relief to the chief and indeed to all the villagers. The chief at once informed the villagers. All the elders rushed to the house of the chief. They blessed him and narrated their tragedy. Tears came to their eyes.

The next morning all the villagers flock to see the strong man whose strength & courage became the talk of the village. Every family offered him fresh fruit, but nobody dared to accompany him.

Like Bhima, the young guest started on his journey to the snake. He was not in a hurry. He was walking & strolling leisurely and confidently. The traveller took an

axe as the only weapon. The snake became angry to see the strange late-comer. The snake was about to coil him with the long tail. The traveller charged at the snake with the sharp axe. A battle ensued.

The day which had begun in the morning passed very painfully, for anxiety accumulated with each moment. All the villagers were eagerly waiting for the traveller. At last, in the afternoon, the traveller killed the snake and happily came back with the axe stained with blood.

Returning to the chief's house, the lonely traveller was amazed to find himself standing amid a crowd of admirers. He became the guest of every house. He was overwhelmed by their hospitality. He was taken to the forest & field, in hunting & fishing. Slowly and slowly, the chief's daughter and the guest started loving each other passionately. The chief was glad enough to arrange the marriage, and the villagers were very happy to have him among them.

35. Changsili & a Python

On Lushai Hill lived a peasant family. The peasant made his clearing during the early winter for *jum* cultivation. The peasant had his wife and two daughters. The name of the elder daughter was Changsili.

The daughters were young enough to help their parents at home and in the *jum* field. The heavy works of cutting & burning the bushes, and sowing the seeds were jointly performed by the parents & the daughters. After that, the parents were taking rest at home, while the daughters were going for weeding, and nursing the young plants. Their mother, who had walked up & down the hut-ladder & the steep track of hills, became sick.

Every day at dawn the peasant's wife used to cook rice & vegetables, and wrap up in banana leaf some rice & vegetables for the daughters. The two sisters would carry their food to the field and eat it at mid-day. They

had to walk to the far end of the forest & back daily.

Things were going on as usual. After a few days, things turned a different turn. A snake cast its lustful eyes upon Changsili. The snake had its nest in a hollow tree, at the bottom of the *jum* field. When the two girls had been away from the village, the snake tried to take advantage of the situation, and became successful. At the direction of the elder sister, the younger sister had to call the snake. In response to the call, the snake would come & coil itself up in Changsili's lap.

Being afraid, the younger sister would turn away from the offered food. But she had not been idle. She would weed out the unwanted grass, dug up some root, collect some vegetables & banana leaves. Working in this way and eating no meal at noon, she became weak.

When sun was about to finish the day's trip over the sky, the two sisters, like many of their neighbours, would come back home with basket full of vegetables, fuel and green leaves. In the evening, the parents and the daughters used to sit around the fire-place, and gossip. But hunger kept the younger daughter on the edge of sleep; she would speak little. In front of all, the mother wanted to know the cause of the younger daughter's weakness. The daughter avoided. One day in the morning, while Changsili had been away in a neighbour's house, the mother again asked. Now, being entreated, she disclosed what had been going on in the *jum* field.

Allowing the daughters to leave for the field, the mother sat aghast. She was shocked & surprised; and discussed the problem with the peasant. They planned to kill the snake; the peasant would go to the field along with the younger daughter; Changsili would be asked to nurse her mother.

The next day, the father and the younger daughter went to the field. The father took in a packet the clothes of his wife. The younger daughter followed after the father and chattered on in a soft voice. Reaching the field, they

worked for a while and took rest for meal. Dressed in the clothes of a woman and with a sharp *dah*, the father cut the snake.

The following day, the two sisters went to the field, and the younger sister had to invite the snake. But no snake came. The elder sister was disappointed. The younger sister had to resile from the question. Changsili leered, and tears rolled down her face.

In the afternoon, the two sisters returned home, and found the father lying on the floor just near the door-sill obstructing the passage. Changsili said: Father, get up; I like to scrape off the mud off my draggled feet, on the door-sill.

The father remained there with a machination.

Not bothering about the father, Changsili started to scrape the mud. Suddenly, the father sprang up and cut the daughter. To their astonishment, many small snakes swarmed from the stomach of Changsili. They then & there killed almost all the little snakes, except one.

Only one snake quickly escaped and hid itself in the forest. In course of time, the snake became very strong, ferocious, greedy and epicurean. The hissing sound of the snake was terrible. In the still fall nights, the villagers could listen to the awful sound. The snake rendered the people's life not worth living. There were many children who had been frightened by the snake. The snake would spring at them with wonderful quickness. The deadly snake would sway its hood. It devoured many wild & domestic animals & birds.

The deadly snake's next demand was human flesh. It demanded little children. The villagers in turn had to send one child. One day a wandering Chin came to that village; he found the villagers very gloomy; his host was weeping. He asked the cause. They were weeping & panting. That day, it was the turn of that family to send their child. The visitor was a strong man like Bhima. He assured them and said: I will kill the snake; please give me a goat.

He proceeded to the cave in the jungle and pushed forward the goat. The snake swallowed the meat & the forearms of the young man. Within a moment, by a quick turn of his wrist and sharp knife, he killed the snake.

The young man came back confidently and laughingly. The villagers ever remained grateful to him. They rejoiced.

36. A fair face hiding a foul heart

There were many monkeys in the hills of Tripura. But one monkey was very lovely. The monkey was fashionable and an agreeable speaker. He had a swing.

The monkey laid a trap to prey some other animals or birds. The trap was his swing. The monkey was careful to see that the branch of the tree from which the swing was to hang was strong. The rope was strong & properly fastened. The monkey liked the feeling of going up in the air and coming down again with a rush.

One day one bear came and saw the monkey enjoying a good swing without any risk. It was alluring. Being tempted, the bear too wanted to enjoy and sought permission. The tempter smiled and readily gave permission and quickly climbed up the tree-branch apparently to fasten the rope for the safety & security of the heavy animal, but actually to weaken it, to slacken it, to make the swing accident-prone.

The tempter climbed down and said: I have verified and checked, and you may sit firmly in the seat and enjoy. The bear got on the swing. The monkey left the spot with the secret intention of collecting spices, & rice to relish the fresh flesh of the bear.

The evil device of the tempter worked; the swing could not bear the load. It fell down on a deep ditch. But the bear jumped & fell to the adjacent ground. There occurred no physical injury. The cunning monkey rushed to the spot with spices, etc., but found the prey unhurt; the monkey at once changed his tone and started showing

sympathy for the accident. He sought apology.

The bear wrathfully & seriously reviled: You notorious monkey! you made a plot to kill me and to relish my flesh! Now, I shall teach you a lesson. My sharp eyes had followed all your doings.

The bear immediately gruntingly marched forward to chase the cunning monkey. The monkey ran away and climbed up a tall tree. The bear failed to hunt the monkey, and ate the spices & rice of the monkey. Since then the bear and the monkey were not in good terms.

37. Raid begot revolt

The Lushai people had their settlements in the hills bordering Assam and Tripura. As shifting cultivators, they had their villages scattered here & there. And each village had its headman. For a considerable period of time, they were accustomed to adventurous, unsettled life.

Dari Pa was the name of one such headman. Dari Pa was adventurous and ambitious. He felt homely in risks & raids. He had a band of youths. To him they looked for guidance. They used to obey every order of their master. It should not seem strange that every village had its headman, and every headman had his band of youths. It should also not seem strange that those bands used to descend from the hills to the plains of the Meghna Valley particularly during the winter season for raid, for loot & scoot, for headhunting & kidnapping.

In one such occasion of raid, Dari Pa's band of youths captured a little boy named Sibuta, and took him to the house of Dari Pa. Sibuta became the slave of Dari Pa. Sibuta was active and energetic, intelligent & obedient.

Dari Pa had only one daughter named Darlalpui. The father had great affection for the daugther. The daughter had great influence over the father; and she seldom failed in persuading the servant to do as she wished. Thus for year after year, the kidnapped boy was reduced to slavery, drudgery, & ill treatment. Dari Pa, his wife & daughter

did not pause for a moment to consider where such ill treatment might lead them!

Dari Pa went ahead with his adventurous way of life. His band kidnapped a few boys for their master. Dari Pa was happy to have a team of servants and errand boys. Sibuta too gave them necessary guidance. Sibuta was now a young man. Dari Pa, being pleased with his long service, set him free.

Sibuta left his master's village and moved to a distant hill, cleared jungles, built hut and started hunting, fishing, gathering & shifting cultivation. Sibuta married a young, energetic girl. Sibuta had his friends & sympathisers; within a few years, they migrated to settle in the hill of Sibuta. Thus a village grew up. Sibuta became the headman of the new village. Sibuta had to suffer from the practice of raid. He did not encourage raid.

Time rolled on. In one raid, Dari Pa was seriously wounded. No magic, no sorcery, no animal sacrifice could cure him. At last he died. He had no son. His band took the scope to raid the master's house; Dari Pa's wife and daughter were vexed and angry at the outrageous behaviour of the known band. They were equally shocked at the cowardly behaviour of some neighbours who had not dared to protect the two women. Shrinking from fear and hoping to have sympathetic treatment from the old slave, Sibuta, the forlorn mother & the daughter migrated to the village of Sibuta.

Sibuta did not forget the memories of bitterness & cruelties. His neighbours were also aware of those unhappy incidents. At his order, the mother, the daughter and their nine cattle were twitched, fastened and beaten to death. Not even a drop of water was given to them.

38. A battle for water

One day a bear was wandering in the deep forest of Tripura in search of food. The bear found a small lake, and was pleased to find the water of the lake clean, cool

and pure. The bear wished to enjoy the water exclusively by himself. With this selfish motive, the bear engaged a monkey to guard the lake against any encroachment and trespass.

Days went on. Day & night the monkey was sincerely protecting the lake. One day a deer came there. The deer said: Brother! I am very thirsty; kindly permit me to drink a little water. The monkey replied: Brother! this lake belongs to my master, who is a very powerful bear. I can not allow you. Sorry. On hearing the name of the bear, the deer immediately fled.

After sometime a pig came there. The pig said: Sir! I am very thirsty; please allow me to drink a little water. The monkey answered: This lake belongs to a ferocious bear; I can not allow you to drink its water. Being frightened, the pig left the spot at once.

After a few days, a young tiger came there majestically and started drinking the clean water without caring for any permission. The monkey rushed to the spot and tried to dissuade; the tiger made a growl; the poor monkey fled and perched on a tree. But the dutiful monkey went on chattering and squeaking loudly. The monkey had two intentions: to annoy the tiger, and to bring the episode to the notice of the bear.

In the meantime the bear started coming back & heard from afar a noise. Indeed, the unusual chattering of the monkey was heard by the bear from a distance. The bear thus apprehended something bad. On reaching the spot, the bear saw the tiger drinking the water leisurely. The angry bear challenged the tiger, but the tiger went on drinking & bathing defiantly. Now, the bear charged at the tiger with fury. The tiger defended and a battle ensued. Their eyes sparkled. The water of the lake was violently agitated. The two belligerent animals were panting and sobbing. The monkey was beating his own forehead. The scuffle continued for hours. The two animals came to the shore and after a period of sobbing

resumed the quarrel with spirit and courage. There was a jungle all around the lake. The adjacent bushes, and jungles were stifled and dashed violently. They, while screaming, rushing & chasing each other, reached the top of a hill and fell to a deep gorge, several hundred feet below and died.

The wise monkey realised the difficulty of using the water all alone. He invited his own fellows to settle there and narrated the whole episode. The monkeys decided to allow others to use the pure water cautiously. For protecting & preserving the pure water and for providing drinking water, the thirsty users used to present some gifts.

39. The Lushai chief Lirshi

Long, long ago there was a rich man, named Lirshi. Lirshi was the chief of the Lushai community. The Lushai people were shifting cultivators. They were widely distributed in Tripura, Assam, Mizoram, Chittagong, etc. The residence of Lirshi was at a hill of Assam, but it was adjacent to Tripura.

As an administrator, Lirshi was remarkable for neutrality, objectivity & strictness. He vowed to punish the evil-doers, & to protect the honest people. He instilled a respect for law & order in his area. He used to receive & care for the guests, strangers and the local king's employees on tour. He looked after the poor & needy. He used to keep a close & critical watch on the members of the village council in particular & on all the villagers in general.

In those days any journey outside the limits of a man's own village was risky and rare. But Lirshi, accompanied by his trustworthy persons, undertook a journey to a distant village. The purpose of the journey was to judge human character. It was not an adventure. He kept the intention within himself. They travelled and travelled and crossed many hills and valleys and streams

and at last reached a village in the evening.

With a previous understanding, Lirshi got separated from his fellows and went quietly away. He sat in the shade of a tree near the village. He posed like a very poor beggar and made a mock-attempt of loitering, crawling from house to house for food & shelter. The householders drove him away. The children attempted to throw dirt. But he remained quiet and silent.

Meanwhile, the companions strictly concealed the identity of Lirshi, but introduced themselves as the friends of Lirshi. Knowing their identity, the village headman received them gladly and made arrangement for their comfort. Almost all the villagers offered them hospitality.

The strange beggar became an object of neglect and derision. He remained outside till late in the evening. In that village there were two brothers. They were very poor. They had to work hard for livelihood. They were sympathetic enough to offer him shelter and food.

On the following morning, the companions dramatically disclosed the identity of Lirshi. The news surprised all the villagers. They had heard the name & fame of Lirshi, but did not see him. The surprise visit of Lirshi seemed to be a dream. They rushed to offer him a grand reception and warm hospitality. Lirshi accepted their hospitality, but he never idealised them. However, he never forgot the genuine sympathy of the two poor brothers. He halted there for two nights only. Then they turned their steps homeward. Being invited by Lirshi, the two brothers too went to Lirshi's village with him.

While going back home, Lirshi and his companions had lively discussion with the two brothers. The stories of their sufferings were recounted. Lirshi offered the two brothers very hearty hospitality and loaded them with gifts.

Kuki Folk-Tales

40. Eclipse

Once upon a time at a Kuki hamlet lived a rich headman. He had seven sons. Like their neighbours, this family too had to depend on gathering, hunting, fishing and shifting cultivation.

One day the seven sons went to hunt and killed a deer. The six elder brothers asked the youngest brother to guard the dead deer. The youngest brother sat in a shade of a tree. The carcass was pulled from the jungle & placed in an open place. The carcass was to be protected from tigers, jackals, crows & vultures. The deer was squalling & yelling in the shade of the tree.

The six elder brothers, leaving the youngest brother alone, went away to collect firewood, leaves, roots & vegetables. They took time to return. Meanwhile, a gust of wind blew and a few worn out leaves from the tree fell down on the carcass. The magical power of the leaves reanimated the deer. The deer instantly fled away.

In the mid afternoon the six elder brothers found the youngest brother beating his forehead and crying. They enquired about the deer. The youngest brother narrated what had happened. The elder brothers did not believe the statement, and supposed that the carcass had been stashed or sold out. So, they thoroughly thrashed him; the youngest brother fell unconscious in the shade of the tree.

The six elder brothers returned home in the late afternoon. Their father enquired about the youngest son. The evasive reply of the six sons seemed unsatifactory to the parents. The parents became very anxious & annoyed. The father was thinking of going there for a search. He was preparing a bundle of bamboo-splits to be used as a burning torch, and a *dâo*.

Meanwhile, another gust of wind swayed the tree and a few leaves fell down on the body of the youngest brother; the boy immediately came back to consciousness; he stood up and turned his steps homeward with the leaves and a piece of bark of the benevolent tree.

The parents were very happy to see their dear son again. Upon being asked by the parents, the son narrated what had happened. The leaves & the bark were kept securely. The next morning the father advised the son to get the leaves & the bark dried in the rays of the sun for preservation.

The sun was shining brightly. The sun got the hint of the medicinal value of the leaves and the bark. The sun swooped down to snatch the bark & the leaves. The veteran father was on guard with his black dog. Instantly the dog sprang forward and caught the sun and devoured the sun. Very quickly darkness followed. The sudden loss of light bewildered the people. Being directed by the aged father, the black dog let the sun pass out by the rectum. The cause of the lunar eclipse and the solar eclipse lay in that very accident. The moon is the husband, while the sun is the wife.

41. Earthquake

Over the surface of this earth numerous animals, birds, human beings, flora & fauna are visible. In the underworld also similar human beings live. A beetle maintains relations between the two worlds. The people of the underworld require animal-dung; and the beetle carries animal-dung.

The beetle is frequently sent to collect animal-dung. The beetle gets tired in travelling a long distance and in carrying an ever increasing quantity of animal-dung. The tired beetle sometimes tells a lie and reports that there is no man or animal on the other world. All of them have died.

The people of the underworld doubt about the correctness of the report and to verify the statement,

they shake the earth. The earth trembles, and the animals flee, the birds fly and the human beings shout & blow conchshells and run helter-skelter. Thus, knowing the existence of the living being on earth, the dwellers of the underworld accuse the lazy beetle for telling a lie.

The people of the underworld threaten the beetle and compel it to collect animal-dung. The animal-dung turns into gold in the underworld. The occasional shaking causes earthquake.

42. Origin of a poisonous creeper

There was once upon a time one Khucong Kuki chief, named *Râjâ* Subharay. The *râjâ* had a beautiful daughter. The royal family was in search of a bridegroom. The *râjâ* had several right-hand men. They gave the whereabouts of another Kuki family living at a distant hemlet. In that family there were seven brothers; they were hardworking and able-bodied young men.

The *raja* gave consent for the negotiation. The seven brothers rejoiced that they would get such a beautiful princess. The marriage was celebrated with great pomp at the village of the *râjâ*. After two days, the new couple left for their own residence. The new couple were given a hearty reception by the villagers. A feast was arranged.

As the new couple had been sitting for a long time during the ceremony for about two days, their eyes shut with fatigue and they felt fast asleep. When at last the bride awoke, it was found that the groom lay dead. The bride began to weep at dawn. The other brothers rushed to console her. The village elders too came to show sympathy and to arrange the cremation.

After a few days, the village elders directed the second brother to marry the bride. But alas! they fell fast asleep, when at last the bride awoke, it was again found that the second brother lay dead. In this way, the first six brothers were married one after another, and the six brothers died mysteriosly.

Now, came the turn of the seventh brother. Obeying the advice of the elders, he too married the bride in a very simple ceremony. There upon, they both went to bed. At night the bride fell into a deep sleep. Horror let him have no sleep. He was thinking & thinking. The seventh brother pretended to be asleep. A serious thought came to him; he stayed there in the same bed a while, & looked around. A terrible fear fell on him. Slowly & silently he left the bed and stashed himself in a dark corner. At about mid-night, the seventh brother saw a strange thing: he saw a poisonous small snake springing out of the nose of the bride. The deadly snake swayed; searched around, found no male and retreated back into the nose of the bride.

The seventh brother was terribly frightened; but he did not get perturbed. All was not well as it should be with the lady; she was a witch. He thought of nothing, but how to punish and kill the bride. When day dawned, he poked her in the side with his elbow and said: Get up my dear fair lady; let us go into the forest to fetch leaves, vegetables & firewood, etc. They walked a long distance across the precipitous jungle country. She peeped back at the house again & again. When they reached the middle of the deep forest, he said: You collect some leaves & vegetables; I am digging out some roots & tubers.

He dug a deep pit near the shade of a big banyan tree. Overcome with anger & impatience, he beat her savagely with a chump. He seized the bride by her head and threw her out into the deep pit and covered the pit. Thus she died a pitiful death.

The seventh brother returned home and made a mockery of mourning for the accident. The sad loss was reported to the bride's parents. The *râjâ* suspected some evil. With his retinue he came there and made a thorough search on the jungle, but failed to locate the spot. Disappointed and distressed, the *râjâ*, along with his retinue, returned home. For days & nights he could not eat, sleep and rest.

Then, one night the daughter's soul appeared in dream, and narrated the episode. The soul made startling revealations thus: I am *Nâg-Kanyâ*. I came to kill the six brothers for their crime of head-hunting. My dead body has been buried near a banyan tree. From my navel a creeper has already begun to grow. The creeper has medicinal value. Its juice is poisonous. The juice is powerful enough to hurt any animal, any enemy and to stupefy fishes.

Accordingly, the *râjâ* again visited the spot and saw a creeper growing out of the dead body. He left it undisturbed.

Chakma Folk-Tales

43. Dhobi and Kobi

Long ago in the hills of Tripura in a certain village lived a small family. Three members, the father, the mother and one daughter, composed this little family. The daughter's name was Dhobi. Dhobi, about five years of age, was equally skilful in physical and in mental exercises.

The family subsisted on shifting cultivation, gathering, fishing, animal husbandry and basketry, etc. Any family of the village could reclaim & cultivate from the unused hills as much ground as it could handle; but the family had to inform & obtain the consent of the headman and to make a ritual worship. After one year, the land would be left fallow; it would revert to the headman for redistribution. Legally all lands belonged to the king.

Like the Tripuri, the Riâng, the Noâtiâ, the Jamatia, the Hâlâm, the Kuki, the Lushai, the Garo, & the Uchai communities, the Châkmâ community too had to practise shifting cultivation. Each family had to select a hill-slope for clearing & planting. The bambooes, bushes, trees & creepers had to be cut down & left to dry during the

dewy season and burned after several weeks. Some heavy works would be done by the villagers jointly & joyously. Planting would be done by poking holes in the ground. Planting before the rainfall and weeding after the rainfall were their routine affairs.

The parents of Dhobi used to go to the field for planting & weeding. The weeding operation had to be repeated three times. While working in the field, the mother would often get tired and insisted on drinking water. The father had to insist on the continuation of the work.

She said: I am very thirsty; give me water.

He said: Wait a little, wait a little.

After sometime, she would give reminders, while he would persuade with humour to weed a portion of the field. The weather was very unkindly at that time. The sun was scorching the fields & forests; the streams became dry. One day it was about noon; the atmosphere was uncanny and severe. She cawed to her husband: My dear! I shall die soon. You bring water immediately.

She retired, and sat in the shade of a tree. He rushed to the stream below and found a little of water inside a pit, the pressure of wild deer's hoof made the pit. In another very shallow pit made by some crab, there was still less water. He offered the deer's hoof's water to her, and kept the crab's pit's water for himself. She eagerly swilled it and said: Pray, give me your share of water. He said: There is no water for you, not even a drop!

The shrew woman became impatient; she started reviling her husband. She squabbled. He sat staring at her and trying to hide his thirst and annoyance; at last, he broke into an anguish: Your thirst is insatiable; you turn into a tortoise.

Surprisingly then & there the woman was turned into a tortoise. He sat down in disappointment and muttered: How foolish I have been! Oh dear! oh dear!

sighed the tortoise. Let me depart! Let me depart! The tortoise slowly & slowly walked down the hill-slope and immersed into the stream-water far below the course.

Going back home in the afternoon, the moanful father now beheld a pathetic scene. Dhobi was anxiously waiting; she asked: Where is my mother? The father could have cleared up the mystery with a few words; but instead, he replied: Your mother has gone to her sister's house. She will come back tomorrow.

The next day, he went alone to the field and spent the day in weeding, nursing,& guarding. While returning, he went to see the tortoise down the stream. He did not forget her; he muttered and beat his forehead. The tortoise waggled the head up & down and stared pathetically. Thus seven days were passed. Meanwhile, Dhobi's restlessness & anxiety went on increasing. The father tried to resile from the main topic & digress other topic. Dhobi became suspicious and adamant and said: I will go to my mother's sister's house. The daughter's earnest appeal put the father to trouble and compelled him to clear the mystery. On waking the next morning, the father & the daughter cooked & ate and took packet (*mochâ bhât*) of mid-day meal and set out for the field and the stream. Dhobi cried, called upon & invoked her mother. The tortoise walked out of the water. They sobbed. Dhobi became draggled & emotionally surcharged.

Market, town, city & motor vehicle to-day mean little to lakhs of citizens of Tripura; but during the medieval period all those meant something astonishing. The growth of town & city in the the rural society of Tripura was slow unless the kings encouraged the promotion for the purposes of administration & defence. Most of the markets of Tripura in those days were located along the western fringe near the Bengali settlements. The hills people had to walk several miles to reach a weekly market. The hills people would carry their goods like bamboo, baskets, cotton, jute, vegetables to sell, and they would

buy such things as kerosine, dry fish, utensils, tools, ornaments, medicines, blankets, etc. In those days, they would carry a long knife, without which travelling was risky.

One day Dhobi's father went to a distant weekly market. The day's weather was dull; the clouds hung heavily. The path was slippery. There were numerous fire-flies glowing intermittently. The father of Dhobi had a bomboo-torch (*chunga-batti*) in his hand. He turned his steps homeward. It was a weary walk. He trudged almost half the way. Suddendly a gust of wind extinguished the bamboo-torch. He found himself alone and confused. So he sought refuge in an adjacent hut. By a strange decree of fate, it was the hut of a widow. The little family consisted of two members : the widow and her daughter named Kobi. At his arrival, they were smiling cunningly. He wanted to rekindle the torch for going back home. But they said : Wait a little, wait a little; take rest and smoke.

He wanted to avoid them and leave the hut. He sat on his haunches limpingly only to lift the basket (=*Langa*) on his back. The widow made a pretension of helping the man, but she pressed him closer to herself. He earnestly assured her that he had no intention to cajole her, no desire to marry her. The passionate widow had a certain wild attractiveness. She wanted to persuade him for marriage. To this end she used all her arts. For the moment she persuaded him to halt for the night. He agreed.

The woman had a flock of cocks & hens. One cock had the rare capacity of understanding the meaning of human language. The cock jollily cast jokes at her, and humourously threatened to disclose her game. The woman too threatened to kill the cock. Thus they bantered at each other.

The next morning she struck into a bargain. She made the proposal of marriage a public affair. His halt

and presence in her house set the scandalous tongues wagging. Inexpressibly shocked, the man condemned the game as a wicked malice. But the woman's neighbours forced him to marry her then & there.

The next day he returned home with the new wife and her daughter, Kobi. Dhobi was of about the same age as Kobi. Their arrival surprised and shocked Dhobi. She asked: Who are they? The father did not tell his daughter the true story, and the actual reason. Instead he said: You are alone; so a companion has been brought for you. And the elderly woman will serve you as the substitute of your mother. She will cook for us all. The villagers assembled there. A hubbub of voices were heard. The talk between the father and the daughter was sentimental & touchy! The daughter asked: How shall I address her? The father replied: You address her as your aunt. Dhobi reconciled. But the aunt did not hug her in affection. Dhobi felt neglected & rejected.

Months & years rolled & turned like a wheel. The new members spent a great deal of their time & thought over their own interests. The untoward event of remarriage complicated the relations. Kobi & her mother were on bad terms with Dhobi & her father. It became a broken family, a divided house, though both the sides used to maintain a veil of courtesy. Soon the home life became filled with bitterness, cunningness, diplomacy & quarrelling. Kobi & her mother contrived to discover some of the secrets which Dhobi & her father guarded so tactfully. Their inquiry apparently failed to expose the history of the tortoise. So, Kobi stealthily set out to watch the activities of Dhobi & her father. After traversing a distance of jungles, Kobi sat in a hidden place and saw Dhobi & the tortoise in a gloomy state of mind. Kobi quickly returned home and reported to her mother. Now when the circumstance came to her knowledge, Kobi's mother determined to turn it to her own advantage. But before she could derive any advantage from that episode,

she must, by any means, manage to upset Dhobi's father's mind and to upbraid him, to charge him with something disgraceful.

Now, she plotted to put a psychological pressure on the mind of Dhobi's father. She pretended to be remorseful the moment the father & the daughter used to set their feet in. She alleged: You have your former wife; you have suppressed that fact; you still maintain connection with her; you have enticed and kidnapped me; tell me what made your first wife to be transformed into a tortoise?

But, while he sought to make amends for his long silence, nothing in the shape of a reconciliation ever took place between Dhobi's father & Kobi's mother. The reason was obvious. It was a case of the sieve accusing the needle for being porous. In fact, the widow flirted, enticed and entrapped the widower right from the market day. The cunning widow did never look after the comfort of Dhobi & her father even after her remarriage. She made attempts to strike her forehead with hands, to wave her hands, to threaten him with the fear of committing suicide only to expedite his confession and surrender.

There was one terrible sorrow in his life. He narrated the circumstance which led to the transformation of his wife into a tortoise. After the confession, they lived in apparent amity for sometime. In those days what we now suppose a peaceful conjugal life was not in every case true. Dhobi & her father found it more & more difficult to live amicably.

Kobi's mother & Kobi now made a conspiracy of killing the tortoise. To execute the plot, Kobi's mother pretended to be suffering from bone-ache. To cure the disease, the village *ojhâ* was called upon. The *ojhâ* tried his best, sacrificed a cock, & examined the intestine, spine, chest & backbone of the cock and found nothing abnormal. The *ojhâ* did not prescribe any remedy.

To add to the anxiety of Dhobi's father, the woman

directed him to catch a tortoise. He became very anxious. She looked forward eagerly to his reply. He gave an evasive reply & went to the field with Dhobi. There in the field the father & the daughter discussed about it freely. It eased them a little. They were worried to protect the tortoise. But their weariness was inadequate.

During their absence, Kobi & Kobi's mother strolled, smiled, ate a good deal of food. On the arrival of any neighbour, they suddenly had to be conscious and to pose to be ill in an attempt to conceal their evil design. And Kobi pretended to nurse her mother & with some pretence of disgust towards Dhobi & her father for their indifference!

The father & the daughter returned home in the evening. On the eve of their arrival, the woman quickly went to her bed and started gnawing her fingers in agony. Dhobi's father sat nearby and started to smoke tobacco with a long bamboo-pipe. She insisted on catching a tortoise and watched his face. Dhobi's father listened quietly. This continued for a few days. She talked to him a hundred times about the medicinal value of the meat, & about the dream. An expression of mental illness!

He dawdled, but failed to thwart her evil design. He was rather forced to use fishing nets, traps, lines & baits to catch the tortoise. After the morning meal, he had to walk down to the stream and try to catch the tortoise. Dhobi accompanied her father one day and whispered to the tortoise about the evil design. He told the wicked woman what arrangements he had made for catching the tortoise. He assured her, but failed to pacify her. As the last attempt, he had to set *Ândhâ barshi* at night. It consisted of a short but strong forefront of a bamboo, a strong thread, a hook & a bait. It was firmly set in the mud near the coast of the stream in the evening. It misguided the tortoise; the tortoise swallowed the bait. The next morning the man brought the tortoise with a heavy heart.

Kobi & her mother chuckled and asked Dhobi to make necessary preparations for cooking. They hastened the departure of the man for the field, but hindered Dhobi's departure, and threatened Dhobi with dire consequences in case of her refusal to cook the meat. The henpecked man complained in an unmanly way and left home for the fieldwork. Dhobi bewailed and started roasting the tortoise. What a pity to roast the mother! Unable to bear the burning sensation, the tortoise tossed & grumbled: I fed you milk; now you are roasting my breasts! I carried you on my back; now you are roasting my back! I hugged you, and now you are roasting my hands! Meanwhile, Dhobi became mentally sick with anxiety & anger; she made a harsh reply: Mother! you deserve it. You were shrewish & shirker, impulsive & peevish.

Kobi's mother was inordinately fond of the meat. She said to Kobi: You see, my strategy is not a bad one after all. Now is your time. I have managed to bring the tortoise within our reach!

Now all hands were engaged in slaughtering, chopping, clearing, mincing, washing & cooking the meat. The woman and her daughter were in high spirits; they relished a large portion of the meat. Dhobi flatly denied to eat the meat; she did not say anything more; she felt a twinge of horror. Kobi gave a quick glance at Dhobi & turned her eyes away at once.

Dhobi was waiting anxiously for the return of her father. He returned in the late afternoon. A feeling of disgust surged up in his mind at the thought of seeing Kobi's mother again. Kobi's mother offered him a dish of meat. He refused; he said: You have a disease, you need it. You have good appetite. You consume as much as you can.

Dhobi's father had, deep in his heart, an aching. The father & the daughter sat opposite one another, as they had so often sat before. Initially they had nothing to say to one another, and sat in silence. Slowly they started

recollecting the old memories, the memories of the market day. They whisperously concluded with the role of the cunning woman who made them wretched. They poured out anecdote after anecdote. The discussion was interrupted by the peeping from the otherside. They resumed to topics which the father & the daughter liked most.

When the woman and her daughter had finished eating in the evening also, they had still a quantity of meat. They ate voraciously and threw away the remnant into a pile of rubbish.

Surprisingly, within a very short time a gourd plant germinated out of the meat and grew up rapidly in the pile of rubbish. For constructing a traditional cottage the ridge at the top of the centre of the house had to be usually about 20 feet high and the rafters had to slope down from the horizontal ridge-pole to the sides about 8 feet above the ground. The rafters would be covered with thatching grass. It was a general practice to let the pumpkin plants, the gourd plants and the bean plants climb up the roof of the fences. These three plants have long & numerous creepers. The creeper-massed roofs & fences add to the prosperity of the peasants. Nevertheless, the gourd plant in that cottage grew profusely with several off-shoots, leaves & flowers and fruits. One gourd was hanging from the roof. While moving up and down the cottage, Kobi's mother's head touched the pendant gourd. The gourd swinged dingle-dangle. Every now & then the pendant gourd seemed to be an obstacle. Fuming with anger, the woman muttered: The tortoise, being transformed into the gourd, is striking me. Are you shameless? I will teach you a lesson.

The woman cut & cooked the gourd. The mother and the daughter ate the curry. The father & the daughter refused to eat the curry; their grief was poignant. So a portion of the curry was left uneaten. The uneaten curry was thrown away into the pile of rubbish. Astonishingly,

a *Sâlik* bird (= Martin, or common Mayna) was born out of the curry. Dhobi & Kobi took care to nurse the nestling. They got pleasure in the chirping of the bird.

Dhobi & Kobi now became interested in weaving. They chatted gaily while they worked on loom. They worked on waist loom. In waist loom the task of warp tension is effected by tying one end of the loom to a pole, and the other to a belt around the weaver's waist. Two heddles are required to any loom. One heddle is passed under every alternate warp. The remaining warps are tied to the second heddle. By alternately lifting each heddle, the weft is passed through the shed by means of a bobbin.

Anyway, to Dhobi & Kobi, as to most of the girls & women of Tripura in those days, weaving was not a fashion, but a passion & an occupation. Dhobi took care to work out beautiful designs on the clothes. But Kobi did not care.

Moreover, Dhobi was careful to perform most of the household jobs, cleaning, washing, fetching water, collecting firewood, weeding, etc. Kobi was idle, imbecile, inefficient and slow; it was in her habit to speak randomly & to work whimsically.

Dhobi & Kobi were contemporaries. They were no longer children. They had now blossomed into youths. Dhobi was handsome, while Kobi was ugly and careless. The *Sâlik* bird keenly observed the two girls and compared their behaviour. The bird used to praise Dhobi, and tease Kobi. One day Kobi became very irritated and killed the bird with one sweep of the heddle. The corpse was thrown away in the pile of rubbish. Again. there grew up a plant of pomegranate rapidly. The plant swiftly became loaded with branches, leaves, flowers & fruits.

One day one prince accompanied by his retinue set out for hunting in the deep forest. While chasing an animal, the prince hurriedly moved ahead, leaving behind the retinue. The prince found himself alone. The sun

then sank below the horizon. Having traversed without discovering the animal & the retinue, the prince halted in the shade of a tree to rest & refresh himself. The wild birds, differing from each other in form & plumage, were fluttering & chattering. The prince climbed up a tall tree and saw the black smoke going up thick into the sky. There must be a hut. The hut was at a long distance. There was no path.There were bushes, stream & dingles. The prince walked down and reached the hut of Dhobi's father.

The prince shouted to the residents of the hut. Kobi's mother & Kobi came to the door with a lamp and asked who he was. The prince concealed his identity and said: Do not be afraid. I am one of the servants of our prince. We set out for hunting. I was left behind. I seek shelter for one night only.

The mother and the daughter paused for a while and fell back without a word of courtesy. They dodged and lay down to sleep.

Dhobi's father and Dhobi welcomed the visitor and invited him to come in and stay for supper. The father offered seat and water; while the daughter cooked rice & vegetables. The draggled visitor washed his hands & legs. Within an hour the supper was ready. The hungry visitor ate to his heart's content. The visitor praised her skill & ingenuity. The tired visitor had a sound sleep.

The next morning, having awoke before any one of the hosts, the visitor began to get ready for departure. Dhobi put water, dry food and betel leaf beforc the visitor. The father & the visitor were talking to each other; the visitor remarked: What impressed me the most was the fact that your daughter gladly cooked last night and modestly served food. She has certain sterling qualities. I shall try to convince our dear prince to marry Dhobi.

Kobi's mother was not to lose this opportunity. The mother & the daughter came forward and looked at the father & the daughter obliquely. So Dhobi & Dhobi's father

retreated. Here the woman had to restrain herself from making any unkind remark. But she remarked: Dhobi is worthless; Dhobi knows nothing. Kobi is active, energetic and efficient. Yet it was certain that if Kobi had been skilful, Dhobi had been more skilful. The visitor listened patiently to the complaints and to the compliments. The visitor went back home in splendid spirits.

The prince & his retinue chatted gaily while they strolled. The prince gave expression to his adventure & romance. The king came to know it; the king sent his spy for verification. On getting satisfactory report from the spy, the king & the queen gave green signal to the prince to proceed ahead.

The prince now made up his mind. His determination enchanted & delighted his friends. So, on an auspicious day the prince with his retinue set out in a high spirit. On the way they sat in the shade of an old banyan tree, and they eased themselves by singing & gossiping. The prince bethought himself of sending forward one intelligent friend to alert & inform the family of Dhobi.

The friend was a charming youngman. He was eloquent. On behalf of the prince, he gave a basket full of useful things & provision as presents. The father & the daughter were delighted to hear the praise of their hospitality, to hear gallant & witty words. Then he made the formal proposal and disclosed the identity of the visitor.

The proposal embarassed Kobi's mother & Kobi. It made them too envious to see Dhobi happy. The mother & the daughter walked slowly away from the spot. They were disappointed and irritated. They tore off rudely the musk of courtesy. They frowned.

The friend's eyes went to Dhobi with little smiles. Her father said: Do tell me all about the prince. The friend narrated the story of prosperity & grandeur of the royal family. Now & then came a flash of humour. Dhobi kept silent. The father said: How wonderful it is to have

a prince as my son-in-law. Had Dhobi's mother been alive, she would have been extremely glad. About an hour later, a sound of many voices was heard. The prince & his friends were arriving & chattering among themselves. Here the talk immediately ceased. The father & the friend sprang to welcome the bridegroom & his friends.

Dhobi's father rushed to the headman's house with the news and invited him. The headman came immediately to welcome the bridegroom. The headman and the council of elders invited the villagers who spontaneously cooperated to arrange a feast. The youths of the village, very pleased with their assignment, ran off to prepare the marriage pandal. The glow of evening was just beginning to tint the sky. The village priest solemnised the marriage ceremony. The next day, after the completion of some minor rituals, and the first meal of the day, the prince and his friends and Dhobi left. The villagers' spontaneous cooperation frustrated Kobi's mother's secret attempt to sabotage the ceremony.

In the royal family, Dhobi found herself in a new world of peace & prosperity, far removed from the disgusting, humdrum days of her paternal home. The royal family offered the bride pleasures & delights, and freedom from anxiety & jealousy.

A few days later, Dhobi along with the prince came back as a custom of return visit. This time the mother & the daughter pretended to be very courteous, polite, helpful and skilful. This time Dhobi thought herself saved. But alas! her danger was not yet over. The mother & the daughter coldly contrived to kill Dhobi. Early in the morning, Kobi & Dhobi sat together on the platform in the back side of the traditional hut; Dhobi was displaying her ornaments. Kobi took one ring from Dhobi and intentionally dropped the ring down. The prince was sleeping at that time. Kobi made a mockery of courtesy & said: Sorry, sorry. The ring has slipped. Dhobi said: Please, collect it immediately. The prince will reproach me

Kobi said: Any way, you go downstairs and collect it. Dhobi hurriedly strolled along and kneeled down to search the ring. At that very moment Kobi poured out extremely hot water on the body of Dhobi.

Dhobi was terribly wounded; she died then & there. She became a shadowy ghost. The ghost took shelter in the pomegranate plant. The mother and the daughter again met after a long time. They talked to each other in a very low voice.

Kobi quickly got herself dressed with the clothes & ornaments of Dhobi and behaved like a bride, claiming herself to be Dhobi. On examining attentively the behaviour of the new wife, the prince became a little doubtful. But he did not consider it prudent to push the investigation any further. After a few days, the prince along with Kobi returned home.

The members of the royal family also slowly became suspicious. Their doubt was confirmed by the behaviour of Kobi. Kobi felt uneasy in the company of the prince's relatives & friends. The prince privately discussed the matter with his parents and afterwards with the friends. The intelligent friend, who had made the formal proposal, confidently confirmed the fraud. It was a clear case of cheating, imposture and deceitfulness. The royal family wanted the prince to do away with the problem. The prince made up his mind.

The rainy season was approaching rapidly. As such a journey would have been troublesome; the prince was anxious to remedy the problem before the rains commenced. So, one day in the early morning the prince along with Kobi turned his steps towards the house of Kobi. There the prince looked withered and broken, and his natural gifts seemed to have left him. The life which had been so charming, seemed inept. Kobi's mother asked the prince: My son! why you are so gloomy? The prince meditated on the question of the cunning woman before answering. He tried to avoid. Instead, he asked Kobi:

What happened to your hand? Why your curry is not as tasteful as it was earlier? Kobi replied: It all depends on taste & temperament. I shall try.

Meanwhile, while the prince & Kobi had been asleep at night, Dhobi used to come, cooked, left a portion, ate a portion, tied up a betel leaf with a corner of the prince's dress. Very early in the morning, while others were asleep, the prince awoke and got confused to see the betel leaf and the curry. He ate and found it very tasteful. The same thing was repeated the next night; it puzzled the prince; it seemed to be a great mystery. He decided to discover the mystery. The next night Dhobi arrived stealthily and started cooking. The prince pretended to sleep. The prince hugged her while she had been tying the betel leaf. Dhobi said: Prince! please catch my clothe. The prince caught the clothe. Dhobi vanished, leaving the prince frustrated! The next night Dhobi surreptitiously came & started cooking very cautiously & silently. The prince too pretended to be asleep; he was anxiously waiting for the moment. At the opportune moment he caught her firmly and passionately and earnestly requested her to disclose the mystery. Dhobi surrendered and narrated the history. The time was speeding; the situation demanded a solution. The prince sought a solution. Dhobi said: It is very difficult on my part to get transformed into a human being. Only by the grace of god it may be possible. If you pray for a quantity of juice from the pomegranate for both of us, then it may be possible. And if you promise to divorce the second wife, if you promise to remain committed to monogamy, then it may be possible. The prince hurried to remember the memory of Dhobi's mother and to seek her blessings, and prayed to god.

The tree lowered down its branch in which a pomegranate was hanging high above. The prince got the splendid fruit and offered juice to Dhobi. Dhobi immediately got transformed into human being. She appeared to be charming & graceful.

At dawn a crimson tinge was glowing in the east. The mother & the daughter became bewildered to see Dhobi alive again. The prince scoffed them, and ordered to beat the mother soundly, and to thrust Kobi alive into a deep pit. Thrashed & thrust, they died then & there.

The prince gave sufficient provisions for Dhobi's father. The couple left with a high spirit. What it was in Dhobi that filled the prince with delight? The prince did not know. The prince knew only that when she was with him, he was happy. And Dhobi got attention, affection and emotional security. Henceforth, even temporary absence & separation seemed to be painful to both.

44. Punish the original criminal

In the south-eastern corner of hilly Tripura there was a lonely, sylvan place. In it lived two friends: a toad and a titmouse. In that vast wilderness the toad and the titmouse continued to live in great friendship. In weal & woe they helped each other. But once, over a trifling issue, they quarrelled and got alienated; an estrangement began.

The cruel toad threatened the titmouse very rudely. The toad said : Wheresoever you go, I shall devour you. The poor titmouse was frightened; he could not eat & sleep. The vicious toad cherished the grudge so as to catch and kill the titmouse. Being afraid, the titmouse decided to leave the place and to take shelter inside the nose of a hornbill bird.

The hornbill bird had its nest in an old & tall banyan tree. The bird was living there happily and peacefully. The bird was unprepared for the sudden infiltration of the titmouse. Infiltration embarrassed the bird. The bird louldy sneezed.

Exactly at that time, a monkey, holding a big fruit, was perching below on a branch of the same banyan tree. The monkey was thinking of relishing the fruit. But the mighty sneeze broke the stillness and unnerved the

monkey. The heavy fruit slipped and dropped below.

A deer sat in the shade of the banyan tree. In the vast wilderness the deer was leisurely snoring in sleep. The heavy fruit fell on the deer abruptly. The deer was confused, and took it to be a natural calamity, an occasion of earthquake. The deer ran hastily.

The wild jungle had many wild cocks and hens also. One hen, at that time, was hatching solemnly. But, while fleeing recklessly, the deer seriously disturbed the hen, and trod the eggs. The eggs were broken. The hen became very grievous.

Decomposed leaves in a humid soil provide ideal shelter to insects. Below the layer of the leaves the poisonous red ants found a shelter. The hen grievously scratched a spot helter-skelter throwing numerous red ants into confusion. The hen devoured many eggs of the red ants also. The cruel red ants became agitated.

A wild swine sat in the shade of a tree. The swine was taking rest leisurely. In the mean time, hundreds of the agitated ants swarmed & moved all around rashly and hastily and found the idle swine, and bit the innocent swine. The swine was suffering from pain.

Now, at a distance, there was a hamlet where some Riang families lived. They were all shifting cultivators. One widow of that village made a clearing in hillslope and sowed various seeds. With the help of others, she built a hut in the clearing for watching and protecting the crops against the depredations of animals and birds. The pained swine stood up and fled and ravaged the crops of the poor widow.

The widow dared to go to the court of the king of Tripura, and sought justice and accused the wild swine. The king was sympathetic and prompt to send his police for bringing the wild swine.

Maharaj : Swine! why did you ravage the crops?

Swine : *Maharaj!* because the ants bit me.

Maharaj : Ants! why did you bite the swine?

Ants : *Maharaj!* because the hen ravaged our shelter.
Maharaj : Hen! why did you ravage the shelter?
Hen : *Maharaj!* because the deer trod my eggs.
Maharaj : Deer! why did you tread the eggs?
Deer : *Maharaj!* because the monkey dropped a heavy fruit.
Maharaj : Monkey! why did you drop a heavy fruit?
Monkey : *Maharaj!* because the hornbill sneezed violently.
Maharaj : Hornbill! why did you sneeze violently?
Hornbill : *Maharaj!* because the titmouse entered into my nose.
Maharaj : Titmouse! why did you enter into the nose of the hornbill?
Titmouse : *Maharaj!* because the toad terrorised me.
Maharaj : Toad! why did you threaten the titmouse?
Toad : *Maharaj!* for many years we lived in great friendship. But once over a difference of opinion on a very minor issue, our relation became bitter; out of that estrangement, I threatened. The brightness & happiness of friendship vanished.
Maharaj : Toad! so you are responsible for a chain of misdeeds.

The *Maharaj* released all other accused then and there, and punished the toad. The police gave the toad a good beating. The toad's waist was seriously injured. This is why, the toad can not stand vertically.

Magh Folk-Tales

45. Adventure of an astrologer

There was a country of the Magh people. The Magh *Raja* reigned over the country. The king was benevolent, virtuous and a patron of learning. So, many priests, astrologers, saints would frequent the royal court.

One day one brave and veteran astrologer came to the royal court. The astrologer correctly predicted the fate of the king and the kingdom. The king gave him good food, jewels, a sword and a horse.

The astrologer, riding on the horse, started coming back home. But the rich food of the royal household caused the rumbling of his bowels. In those days human settlement were very rare, and roads were almost abscent. The astrologer had to pass through deep forest. He got down and started excreting. He broke wind so violently that the horse fled out of sudden fear.

The afternoon was falling. There was no hamlet for a shelter. The forest was infested with wild animals like bear, tiger, deer, swine and monkey. With the sword in hand, the astrologer sat hidden in a thorny bush. It was midnight; the atmosphere was dark and silent; he was awake; he hard the sound of the footsteps of an animal. He took it to be his horse. But it was a tiger. With the sword ready in his hand, he jumped up and rode on the tiger; he gripped and whipped the tiger. The tiger, taken by surprise, ran quickly. The astrologer cried: *âil, âil*; the astrologer wanted to mean some path or baulk to be followed. The tiger thought that some greater evil had come; so, the tiger ran faster & faster. After a while, the astrologer realised that it was not his horse; so, he jumped down and whipped the tiger very strongly. The separation was a great relief to both.

The frightened tiger went on fleeing. The tired tiger took rest. His mind was disturbed. In the meantime, the tiger came across another tiger. The second tiger asked: Are you tired? Are you afraid of anybody? The first tiger narrated his sad experience. The second tiger became sympathetic and revengeful. The astrologer lay in ambush; he suddenly sprang up and whipped the second tiger. The second tiger also had to flee.

The two tigers started retiring into deep hills. On the way they met a monkey. The monkey wanted to know

the cause of their anxiety. The two tigers narrated their sad experience. The monkey became sympathetic and revengeful. The monkey geared them up. The three friends turned back to smash the enemy. There was a very old tree in the forest. The astrologer climbed up the tree and took rest inside a cavity of the tree. The monkey also climbed up the tree in search of the enemy. The astrologer suddenly caught hold of the tail of the monkey and very rapidly whirled the monkey and then threw away. The astonishing swiftness of decision gave him an advantage in the crisis.

The friends, without any word, fled and fled ignominiously. The tigers lodged a complaint and sought redress from their king. The monkey also sought justice from their king. The tiger-king and the monkey-king convened meeting separately and simultaneously. After a long deliberation, they came to the conclusion that henceforth it was not safe to stay in that forest any longer. They should leave and seek refuge elsewhere. Before leaving, they arranged a grand feast. The tigers supplied meat, and the monkeys supplied vegetables and fruits and firewood.

It was about noon. The cooking was going in full swing. The air became redolent with the smell of fresh meat curry. The astrologer was waiting at a long distance in the shade of the old tree. In the meantime, one woodcutter came there to collect wood, bamboo, etc. As the wind had carried the fragrance, they smelled the odour. So they made an adventure and proceeded stealthily and saw the flocks of animals. They violently made wild cries. The frightened animals screamed, stumbled, felt panic, fled and plunged into the water of the mighty Karnaphuli River. Only one pregnant tiger and one pregnant female monkey did not attend the feast; they were in their resting place; they remained alive; and from them their species survived. All others died. Since that massacre, the depradations of tiger and monkey were considerably checked for a long time.

46. A wise Mayna

Long, long ago in Tripura lived a king. The king had a special interest in ornithology. He had great love & affection for the birds. He discouraged the hunting & killing of birds. So, during his reign, Tripura had a plenty of wild and domestic birds. The song of some birds had length, strength & melody.

One day, one merchant from the Bay of Bengal & Chittagong region came to the court of the king with a Hill Mayna. The bird was taught the local human language. The merchant humbly presented the bird to the king. To show his gratitude, the king permitted the merchant to carry on business in the kingdom of Tripura and granted unhindered passage.

The royal residence was in a big & beautiful garden house. There were ponds, lakes and trees all around the palace. It was like an aviary. Those were very peaceful days. There was no fear of attack by any enemy alien. The king had time to watch the birds. The Hill Mayna was not put in a cage. But the bird was docile and wise enough to remain inside the royal garden and to come back home at night daily and to enjoy the pleasure of the king's affection. The song of birds used to awaken the king at dawn.

During the winter season bands of nomadic birds from the distant northern zone undertake long journey southward and halt in the north-eastern region of Bharat for about three months. The guest birds fly, honk, swoop down majestically and sing melodious songs. Their arrival is an occasion of joy to all categories of people of Tripura.

During one such a winter season, the Hill Mayna encountered the guest birds. The Mayna developed friendship with some of the guest birds. There was exchange of good will and information. In course of such a casual conversation, the Hill Mayna came to know about a particular tree and its fruit. It was not a common tree. It was a rare one; its fruit was exceptionally tasteful with medicinal value.

The Hill Mayna cherished a desire to eat the fruit. The bird duly brought it to the notice of the king and obtained the king's permission for an adventure. Usually in February the guest birds resume their journey homeward. This year the Hill Mayna was scheduled to accompany them.

On an auspicious day, a flock of birds started the return-journey. The Hill Mayna went with them. They travelled and travelled for days & nights. They were soaring and flying northward. They flew over many hills & mountains, lakes & rivers, countries and cities. The tired birds at last stopped their flight and swooped down in a big lake.

The lake was surrounded by hills and jungles. The lake was swarmed with various fishes and birds. There were such birds as kingfisher, water hen, little grebe, swan. crane, heron, duck, etc. The presence of big & white swans was prominent.

The Hill Mayna was an arboreal bird; it roosted on perches locking the claws & toes to branches & twigs of trees. Those guest birds showed the particular tree and its fruits. The Hill Mayna could not resist the temptation of eating the fruit and found it wonderful. The bird was there for more than a week. It was an adventure, a pilgrimage, a journey to an earthly paradise. The character of the Hill Mayna was superior to that of many other birds. The bird had devotion and tenderness for the king.

After a rest of fortnight, the Hill Mayna taking leave from the birds, resumed the journey homeward. The bird took three fruits. It was a long journey. The bird felt the pinch of hunger, and ate two fruits, and kept one fruit for the king. One night the tired bird had to roost on a tree and put the fruit inside a cavity of the tree. While the bird had been in deep sleep, a black snake crawled through the hollow trunk and ate the pulp of the fruit. Not only that, the notorious snake filled the rind of the

fruit with its poison. The bird was unaware of it.

Next day, very early in the morning the bird took the fruit and undertook the last part of journey for the destination. The anxious king enquired about the journey and the lake and the fruit. Giving replies to all questions, the bird gladly presented the fruit.

Having seen the stale & decomposed fruit, the king became suspicious. The king had a very faithful maid servant. She was widow. The king directed the widow to test the fruit. She tested and died immediately. The symptoms of the venom were unmistakable. The bird was thunderstruck, and the king became extremely angry, and within a moment killed the bird with a sharp sword. Suddenly, the whole atmosphere was changed. A strange thing happened. The king arranged the funeral rite of the widow.

At the princely order, the minister arranged to dig a pit at a remote place and put the fruit in the pit and made a strong fencing and placed a signboard prohibiting the use of the tree and the fruit.

Year after year went by. The entire episode became a matter of the past. Memory faded.

Now, in Tripura there was a peasant family. It was a family of three generations with old parents, married sons and grandchildren. The old parents had no control over their emotion; the old woman became a byword for shrewishness; the old man was equally quarrelsome. One day it reached the climax and provoked the old woman to leave the home alone. Sad & lonely, she walked and walked and entered into the forest where the fruit had been planted. The seed germinated, grew into a tree and bore fruit. She read the signboard, and purposely ate a fruit for suicide. But surprisingly she became jubilant, young and beautiful. Happily she turned her steps homeward. The old man, out of repentance, left home in search of his wife. Whomsoever he had met, he would ask: 'Have you seen my wife?' The common reply

was: No. The old man too walked & walked and at last saw a young lady. She identified him and disclosed the mystery, and led him and offered him one fruit and got the result. They returned home with great joy. The news created a great sensation, and reached the ears of the king.

The king soon directed the minister to verify the news. The minister summoned the jubilant couple, and sent a few guards to the forest for bringing some fruits. An octogenarian person ate a fruit in front of the king and immediately became a young man.

Now, there occurred an wild rush of the old people. They became young, happy, uttering songs and shouting.

But the king was overcome with grief, holding his handkerchief to his eyes to hide his face and repenting for killing the Hill Mayna.

Garo Folk-Tales

47. The tragedy of possessing the magic silk clothe

In the old days in a Garo hamlet lived a rich man; he had his wife & one daughter. The daughter was very beautiful.

According to the prevailing matrilineal system, the family had been in possession of a mysteriously woven and wonderfully decorated magic silk clothe. The great great grandmother of the family got it as a gift from some unknown source. Since then, she had been guarding it with utmost caution.

The grand old lady fell sick and as she felt that her end was drawing near, she called her daughter to her bedside and said: Dear child! take this silk clothe; preserve & protect it; touch it. The daughter touched it; soon the form of her body was instantly changed into a bird; the grand old lady uttered a *mantra*; instantly the bird's body was changed into that of a girl.

The daughter was astonished to see the magical

transformation. The grand old woman taught her the special spell. After a few days, the grand old woman closed her eyes.

In course of time, the daughter was married. She had her children. She too fell ill and called her daughter to her bedside and said: Dear child! take this silk clothe; preserve & protect it. She taught the special spell connected with it. Thus, a few generations passed. And the unique heritage passed on from generation to generation.

It was unfortunately the last generation. The rich man's wife suddenly died of an accident; she could not teach the special *mantra* connected with the clothe. The rich man did not live long after his wife's death. He arranged his daughter's marriage, and within a year he died.

Now, the very beautiful daughter and her husband were the only members of the family. The young couple became the custodians of the family's property. They were looking after the affairs of the family with care. The beautiful daughter was now the young wife of a young husband. The young wife had a very hazy idea about the magical silk clothe; the young husband had no idea about it.

One day, the young wife took out the richly decorated magic clothe from the store room only to dry it in the sun rays. She spread it in the courtyard, with a strict instruction to her young husband that under no circumstance he should touch the clothe. She then went down the hill to a nearby stream for bathing and fishing.

Suddenly the sky became overcast with cloud; bank of cloud was moving rapidly. The rain was falling heavily. A mighty thunder broke the stillness of the day. The husband very loudly called for the wife. Because of the squall of rain, she did not hear properly. The special silk clothe was getting spoiled. So, the anxious husband rushed to the courtyard to take the clothe inside. The

moment he had touched the clothe, he was changed into a peacock bird. The young wife rushed to the spot to protect the husband; she too touched the husband; then & there she was transformed into a peahen. This is the reason why peacock & peahen become impatient at the sight of impending rainfall and hailstorm.

48. *Râjâ* Abong Noga

Formerly there flourished a Garo king named *Raja* Abong Noga in the hills of north-eastern part of Bharat.

The *Raja's* kingdom suffered a severe famine. The main cause was drought for a few years. An extreme & protracted shortage of food resulted in starvation, disease and death. Despite the misery & tragedy occasioned by the famine, the king did practically nothing for the welfare of the people.

The Garo community consisted of a number of clans. Each clan had its own village on hill-tops. The villages were scattered here & there. The villages stood apart from one another; between two villages there were hills & jungles. The Garo people subsisted on fishing, hunting, gathering, basketry, weaving, *jum* cultivation, etc.

The *raja* forced his subjects to build a beautiful house for the royal family; to build a garden, to dig a pond, to cultivate an orchard. Not only that, he assigned the work of gathering, fishing, hunting, etc. to the clans for the consumption of the royal family. The royal family had its essential commodities supplied on account of the forced labour. The members of the royal family whiled away the time in the garden, in the orchard, in the palace, in pleasures. They were living in clover.

Stricken with sorrows & sufferings, the subjects were enduring pain in collecting, in gathering, in fishing, in cultivating for the royal family. It produced anguish in the minds of the subjects. Their faces hinted that they disapproved the royal order.

Protesting against the exploitation, the subjects carefully contrived a plot to take revenge, to kill the

members of the royal family one after another. When a certain period of time had passed, the subjects became restless. They killed his daughters, named Mene, Meje, Chini one after another. They attacked the royal guard. Next, they attemped to kidnap the king and the queen, but failed. The king and the queen escaped and fled to a remote hill. Only a few servants accompanied the royal couple.

Now, the king and the queen fell in great trouble. The servants were displeased with the king & the queen. The queen was unskilled and inexperienced in domestic duties & chores. One day, she sought the instruction of the servants about the process of sowing seeds. The servants misguided her. According to their instruction, she boiled the seeds & then went to sow the seeds. The seeds did not germinate.

The king had one grand daughter named Keme. The wet-nurse protected Keme from the hands of the killers. The maid servant was the wet-nurse; her name was Nogang. Nogang said: No, no, the baby is my daughter. Thus, she saved & nursed the baby, Keme. Keme was married to a prince named Ushung *Raja*. Ushung *Raja* was the founder of a principality, at Durgapur in the district of Mymensingh.

49. *Raja* Gangbo Nokma

In the very old days there was in a Garo village a man named Gangbo Nokma; he was a quick-witted, cunning fellow, a *thug*. By means fair & fowl, he earned a lot.

Fired with anger & jealousy, the village elders made a secret plot to kill the *thug*. The plot was to set fire to the *thug's* house at night when he would lay sound asleep. The house was made of bamboo, timber, thatching grass and cane. All combustible materials! And accident of fire was a common experience in those days. The fire would be taken as an accident.

The cunning fellow suspected something fishy. He

told his wife : We should not make the neighbours suspect that we know their plot. We should remove & stash our valuable things away in the deep forest before hand, and we should get away at the right moment through a narrow passage, an egress. Let us continue to live with an apparent carelessness.

One day at midnight, the village elders fastened the doors and set fire to it. The cunning fellow & his wife hurried out through the secret passage, groping their way out in the darkness, & spent the night in the forest. The village elders were at once warm with joy.

The next morning Gangbo came out of the forest and posed like a ruined peasant. With a gloomy face, he sat aghast near the homestead and tended to beat his forehead. The villagers were surprised to see him alive. They gathered around him. In their presence, he filled up a few bags with ashes.

Gangbo carried the sacks of ashes all alone and went a long distance and reached a lonely place. A stream was flowing there. He dropped the ashes in the water and uttered a magic spell imploring the river goddess to punish the elders who had committed arson.

Just after a few days, Gangbo appeared again confidently and smilingly and opened a purse of coins in presence of the villagers. The curious neighbours asked about the coins. He replied: The valuable ashes of my hut have been purchased by some foreign merchants. So, the accident has been a blessing in disguise.

It was a market day. The greedy villagers, without losing time, burned down their own huts, and rushed to the market with sacks full of ashes. But alas! none purchased the ashes. The sellers of ashes became the laughing-stock of the people. They came back home empty-handed.

Fired with anger & hatred, the villagers decided to kill all the cattle of Gangbo. They were about to assault him physically. Gangbo said: I did not advise you to burn your own huts. You did it at your own risk.

The angry villagers forcibly took away all the cattle and slaughtered them. Being implored by Gangbo, the villagers spared the skins. Gangbo washed & dried up the skins, punctured some skins and made some bags and moved southward.

Gangbo travelled & travelled towards south-west. He went up the hillocks & down the hillocks. The rugged features of the mountains were getting softened towards south-west. He went up to a rising ground to look farther. He saw a peasant cultivating his land with plough & a pair of bullocks. He went there and said: Brother, I am a leather merchant. I am at present very thirsty. Kindly give me drinking water.

The farmer directed him to go farther and to seek water from his children.

Gangbo went to the farmer's house and said : Children! your father has sent me for money. You show me the treasure. The children refused to give & refused to show. Gangbo yelled out: Dear friend! your children are not giving.
The busy farmer, without enquiry, said loudly: Give him what he wants.

The children hinted at an earthen pitcher full of coins and jewellery. Gangbo put inside his bag many coins and smilingly left the farmer's house and moved towards the farmer and thanked him.

Following a different track, he decamped and came back home.

On reaching near his village, Gangbo strolled leisurely with a leather bag suspended from the forehead behind the head. In presence of the villagers, he opened the bag and started counting the coins. The villagers rushed there and asked about the coins. He replied: Thank you for slaughtering my cattle and giving me the skin. By selling the skin, I got such a huge amount of money. There is a great demand for such skin.

The foolish villagers slaughtered their own cattle, dried the skins, and carried the skins to the weekly market for sale. They displayed the skins. But nobody purchased.

Eager for making money, that day the villagers had gone to the market earlier. Gangbo left home late in hopes to improve his fortune by any means. While travelling towards the market, he came across a clothe-merchant near a prosperous village. The elderly people of the village went to the market; the children were left behind. Gangbo made friendship with the children and the merchant and wanted to purchase clothes on credit. To befool the merchant, Gangbo showed a house as his own; his name was Onjawa; his father's name was Manjawa. In his dialect Onjawa means 'will-not-give'; Manjawa means 'could not get'. Ignorant of the *thug's* dialect, the merchant noted down the names & handed over the clothes and reminded the *thug* to get the money ready after sometime.

After a few months the merchant came and stood before the house and called on the buyer; the house-owner came out and denied and gave him a good thrashing.

Nevertheless, Gangbo came back home and dressed himself fashionably. Afterwards, the angry villagers returned from the market and tied the swindler up and thrust him into a basket and carried him to a distantly located pond. There, taking the burden off, the unburdened carriers walked away to take rest & food in the shade of a banyan tree.

Meanwhile, a young cowherd came to see the strange basket and asked the captive: Who are you? where are you going?

The captive replied: I am being taken against my will under the orders of our king to be the bridegroom of the lovely princess'.

She loves me. I do not love her.

The cowherd said: You are a fool. You are denying the hand of a princess! I am interested.
The captive said: If you are interested, immediately release me, and you take and get into the basket & remain silent. This was quickly done. Gangbo very rapidly drove away the cattle towards his village, leaving the cowherd inside. Now after taking rest & food, the carriers returned to the spot and thrust off the basket into the deep water of the pond. Returning home, the carriers were astonished to find Gangbo alive and in possession of many cattle. They asked about the cattle. Gangbo said: Thank you for thrusting me off. Inside the pond, there are many cattle. The villagers made many baskets and got into those baskets. Gangbo thrust off the baskets into the pond. There they died. Gangbo got rid off his enemies. He became chief.

50. The Polyglot Chieftain Dampo's Darling

Once upon a time, there was, among the Garo people, a rich chieftain; Dampo was his name; he had one wife and a daughter & a son. They got on very well together. The chieftain used to call her in private: My dear Darling. He was a landlord; he had fields & farms, domestic animals & birds, servants & relatives.

Dampo was a polyglot; he had the mysterious gift of understanding the dialects of animals & birds. But the gift was a blessing as well as a curse. Divulgation of the esoteric knowledge would be fatal.

One night Dampo & his wife lay awake in bed; their cow-shed was not far away; Dampo heard a conversation between an ass and a bullock. The ass said: It is a pity to see you always toiling for our master. You pretend to be sick; do not eat fodder. The bullock said: I am grateful to you. Thank you. I shall follow your advice.

Dampo, on hearing the conversation, chuckled. His wife wanted to know the cause of his laugh. Dampo gave an evasive reply, & said: It is nothing. I am a madman, please sleep. The wife was not satisfied with the reply.

She did not insist, because it was the first occasion. With a friendly smile, she simply said: I am your only pretty dear! will you not tell me the cause of your laugh?

The next morning the servant found that one of the bullocks had been seriously ill. Dampo directed the servant to harness the cunning ass in lieu of the sick bullock. Not at all accustomed to the drudgery of dragging the heavy plough and yoke, the ass became utterly exhausted. The ploughman also gave the ass a good thrashing. In the afternoon the ass saw the sick bullock taking rest in a serene atmosphere in the shade of a tree; it added insult to the injury of the ass.

At night the chieftain remained alert and awake to overhear the conversation between the ass and the bullock. The shrewd ass said: My dear friend! I have a secret news for you. Our master has been seriously thinking to sell you to some beef-eaters, who will cut you to pieces. So, if you like to live, do not pretend to be sick. The bullock thanked the ass for the timely warning.

Dampo overheard the dialogue and smiled again and murmured. The murmuring sound awakened the drowsy wife. It was the second occasion. She became suspicious. She leered and asked: What makes you to smile all by yourself? Are you mentally all right? What are you thinking about? Do you see anything funny about me? Please tell me. I am your only wife? I am the half of yourself!

They could not sleep till late at night; from time to time she went on asking this or that question. She sat & remained awake for hours. Knowning fully well that the confession might turn out to be something fatal, Dampo consoled her and seized her hand and said: My dear darling, please sleep, please sleep! There is nothing in my smile or laugh. I was simply relaxing.

For about three months the nagging continued off & on. Slowly & slowly she was becoming intolerant, aggressive and adamant. She was complaining publicly

& persistently, and asking awkward questions. At last she beat her forehead & cried out: Your love for me is a pretence. Your confidence in me is a farce.

Thus the nagging went to the verge of insanity. Now the chieftain said: My darling! You did not refrain from asking me silly questions on a very negligible issue. And I tried my best to dissuade you. But in vain! So, one day I shall reveal and then die immediately. If you agree, I shall disclose tomorrow. Prepare delicious food for me as the last meal.

The wife agreed. She was found to smile after a long period. She started the preparation. But the chieftain's pet dog, overhearing the conversation, became very sad. The dog stopped eating & drinking; tears were rolling down the muzzle of the dog. The dog lay motionless in front of the house.

Meanwhile one hen, being chased by the majestic cock, seriously disturbed the mournful dog. The dog scorned the hen and the cock and forbade the birds to refrain from enjoyment in view of the impending danger & death.

The cock paid no attention to the dog's advice. Then the dog said: Yesterday, I overheard the conversation between our master & his wife. The master failed to dissuade her. She repeatedly insisted. The master submitted to her pressure and agreed to explain the cause of his soliloquy. After the disclosure, he will die. The master warned, but she stuck to her insistence. So, a tragic incident is impending.

The sprightful cock gremaced & impromptu remarked: What type of chieftain is he? How can such an average man manage the difficult problems of the people? See how I have kept more than thirty hens under perfect control. He fails to control even only wife! He fails to control trifling problems! The lady has bewitched him. He is little better than a henpecked husband. Such a spineless, worthless fellow should have an ignominious

end. It is a matter of shame that we honour him as our master.

After overhearing the conversation between the dog and the cock, the husband came to his senses. He became animated & assertive, daring & dynamic. It was mid-morning; the sun was shining brightly; the wife & her assistants were busy in the kitchen room; the chieftain was busy in allotting duties to the servants.

About two to three hours later, the wife invited the husband for dining. She served the delicious dishes. Dampo relished the food and appreciated the preparation. After that he sat in his *verandah* for chewing betel leaf & smoking. The hubble-bubble was ready.

His wife, after taking the breakfast, sat beside him. Chewing the betel leaf, she eagerly leered to know the secret. Dampo, as a sort of ultimatum, confidently warned about the dire consequence. But she became furious with anger. Dishevelling the hair, she beat her forehead. Dampo suddenly stood up, and catching her hair kicked her and thrashed her thoroughly. She was panting, sobbing and crying. The dog & the cock silently observed the scene. The curious neighbours rushed, but nobody dared to restrain the husband.

Being deluded & debunked, she truckled and did never attempt to annoy the husband. In course of time, they got reconciled and lived happily.

51. Chela Asanpa & Brar

Once upon a time in a Garo village dwelt a hero; Chela Asanpa was his name, a man of gigantic body, immense strength and superb courage. He was young, gay and volatile. He was a voracious eater & matchless wrestler.

Chela Asanpa's special hobby was wrestling. He defeated all the youths of his village one after another. He had his traditional weapens; *milam* (= two-edged sword) and *spi* (= a rectangular shield). He would often grapple

his opponent bare handed and easily knock him down. He was a man of a number of adventures.

One day while travelling along through a dense forest, Chela Asanpa encountered a big wild buffalo. The buffalo attacked him and inflicted a gash. Chela Asanpa lifted the beast off the ground & dashed it against a huge rock; the beast died. Chela took the carcass to a stream, washed it, & then roasted it and consumed it.

Chela girded himself for the next adventure and followed a track across the hills. He travelled & reached a village where another strong man had been splitting bamboos with his mere hands. The strong man offered him hospitality with food, drink and lodging; the host slaughtered a domestic animal for the food of Chela. After the lunch, Chela made a formal proposal of wrestling . The host agreed. The next day in the morning, they cleared a site, bathed, took breakfast and rested for a while. Then they started the game. They roared, struggled, jerked & wrestled. Two goats while fighting agrily draw apart and dash together. Similarly the two wretlers were to threaten each other, approach, draw apart & dash. The villagers stood around with bated breath. The game continued for hours. At last Chela made the last attempt & hurled down the opponent. The villagers congregrated there, applauded; & the wrestlers too appreciated each other. The host again entertained Chela & slaughtered a pig & on the host's request, the village priest sacrificed a hen and cock, examined the intestines and found auspicious sign about the luck of Chela.

Chela turned his steps homeward; while travelling through hills & forest, Chela saw a large & long python. The python coiled & entangled a male deer. The deer struggled to come out of the clutch of the snake, but failed. The deer cried out and died. The snake was relaxing only to relish the deer. Chela twiched & lifted up the dead deer. In the twinkling of an eye, the angry snake entangled and coiled Chela. Chela very promptly caught

hold of the python's head with one hand, and uncoiled himself with another hand and then killed the snake. Returning home, Chela relished the meat of the deer.

Chela again girded himself for another adventure. After travelling a long distance, he saw a strong man; this strong man was husking paddy; he held a big, flat rock on his palm; a big basket of paddy was placed on the rock; he blew the chaff far away with his breath. Chela introduced himself. This strong man offered him hospitality with food, drink & lodging. After the lunch, they sat together for friendly conversation. Chela expressed his desire for a duel. The host agreed. The host slaughtered 25 cocks & hens to entertain Chela with a very rich, delicious dish. The wrestlers dined together. Then they started the game. They roared, chapped, danced, laughed, struggled and wrestled in presence of the villagers. The children, youths and elders stood around and enjoyed the game.

Chela came out victorious. The defeated host took the defeat sportingly. The host's 15 wives, 26 sons and 32 daughters prepared meal and meat-curry with the fried flesh of 25 ducks & 9 cocks. Chela thanked the host for the hospitality.

Chela resumed his journey. As he travelled in the hills, he came to a Garo village; he introduced himself; the villagers offered him moderate food, and lodging in the bachelors' dormitory (= *Nok phanto*). He observed the gloomy face of the villagers. The villagers told him of the depradation of a wild tiger, and advised him not to sleep in the open portico of the *Nok phanto* at night. Chela smiled confidently and slept in the portico. He had his weapon near his bed. At about midnight, the tiger silently came with blood thirsty ferocity; and tiger's eyes were like two torchlights. Chela instantly lay awake, watched & crouched down with the weapon in his hand. The tiger jumped up. Instantly, Chela inflicted fatal injury with one sweep of the sword. The wounded beast jumped

backward & died on the spot. The next morning the villagers rushed to the spot; they were very happy to see the monster dead; the grateful villagers arranged a feast for Chela.

Chela, next, travelled westward and then turned towards north. There in the hills a big elephant rushed at him with evil intention. Chela, catching the elephant's trunk, hurled & whirled the elephant. The elephant was flung to the deep gorge with tremendous violence.

Chela was now travelling homeward. But still it was at a long distance. On the way, he had to halt at a village; There he saw another strong man. Brar was his name. Brar was uprooting stiff clumps of bamboo with his bare hands. Suspecting the stranger to be an enemy, Brar stood up with his weapons (= *milam* & *spi*). Chela smiled & introduced himself. Brar welcomed him and offered him befitting hospitality. After the supper, Chela expressed his desire for a game of wrestling. Brar agreed. The next morning the two players bathed, ate together and came to the ground near a river. The two strong men struggled, roared, dashed, wrestled for hours. The curious villagers stood all around with bated breath; they talked among themselves, encouraged and watched with great suspense. At last, Brar defeated Chela. For the first time Chela's bragging was wounded unexpectedly. However, Brar received again gently and again offered him customary hospitality without expecting anything in return. While leaving the home of Brar, the defeated wrestler made a formal invitation to Brar.

After a few days of rest, Brar decided to comply with the request. However, on his request the village priest sacrificed a few cocks & hens and examined the entrails and found some omens. The divination seemed inauspicious. Now what to do? He was in a dilemma. His aged mother blessed the son. Brar sharpened his weapons.

Meanwhile, Chela too had sacrificed hens & found good signs. He too kept his weapons ready. Brar was

approaching towards the village of Chela. Chela was anxiously waiting for the arrival of Brar. There was a very big *simul* tree (*Bomlaz malabaricum*). It was a sylvan and shadowy environment. Chela lay in ambush and crouched down with weapons in hand. Walking a long distance, Brar got tired; he casually struck the *simul* tree with his weapon; the weapon penetrated the trunk of the tree.

Chela instantly and savagely attacked Brar; Brar's head fell on the ground. Chela treacherously killed Brar. The people mourned the murder of Brar.

Chela killed many animals & birds, & defeated a few strong men; but he could not tolerate the shame of only defeat!

52. Delong's exploration

Long ago, far removed from a Garo hamlet, there was a primeval forest. With its high ranges, deep gorges, towering trees, wild beasts, incredible swarms of mosquitoes, ants & blackflies, & flocks of birds & poisonous snakes, and a melancholy of the wilderness, the primeval forest was a geographic nightmare for a solitary gatherer or hunter. Naturally, the people's fears & rumours grew into a myth, ranging from the claim that the thick forest had been the abode of fairies & elves, to the legend that the wild tract was a queendom. Strange monsters guarded the forest. Numerous fishes used to frolic in the waters of streams inside the hill tract. The melodious songs of the frairies enchanted the air of the area. The mysterious forest was rejected by saints and shunned by men.

In that Garo hamlet dwelt a brave boy; Delong was his name. Delong was endowed with certain qualities to make a happy life; he was young, strong, honest, courageous and faithful & benevolent. Delong and all other children of the hamlet had been hearing those hair-raising tales; but Delong alone became curious. Years rolled on. Delong was now a youth. His curiosity

grew into an obsession with everything sylvan. Born in a family of shifting cultivators and hunters, the boy was tough, self-reliant and adventurous. He planned to explore the wild & fanciful forest. He took dry food, clothes, weapon & a few personal belongings. He made his plan public and sought the permission of the headman and the blessings of the parents. The elders were disconsolate. To them, it was a dangerous & foolish adventure. They were in tears. He comforted them. He had no difficulty in prevailing upon the elders to let him go.

One day by the mid-morning, Delong set out. The villagers came out to encourage, bless and watch the brilliant adventurer. The neighbours stood looking on, while Delong looked back frequently as he moved forward. The scenes gradually faded from their view. There was no youth to equal Delong in discipline & devotion. He was ready to struggle to the death to explore the romantic region. He had no prospect of seeing any person to speak to for days to come.

At long last, he entered the forest. There he came across several wild beasts: buffalo, leopard, tiger, wolf, elephant, deer, dog, monkey, bear, boar, etc. Because of his saintly character, the wild beasts did not even attempt to attack him. The python and the dangerous cobras hissed and slipped; one deadly cobra swayed obediently & left. One hog, uttering a grunting bleat, side-tracked. With their sharp eyes, ears & noses, the beasts found in him no danger. He abstained from killing any of them.

It was a tropical forest; there were plenty of edible roots, tubers, vegetables & fruits. He gathered some vegetables; cooked them and ate. In the stream & springs there were plenty of fishes some of which popped to the surface water. He cought some of them, cooked & relished them. Almost everywhere he had to encounter creeping plants & tangled bushes. He had to force his way along with difficulty.

He moved deeper & deeper into the wild forest, ducking under the dangling branches of trees, side-stepping many trees, plodding & plopped down in the shade of a tree. Thus, he went on roaming in the forest. The sense of sadness & loneliness or the melancholy of the wilderness never came over his mind. Every slight noise used to make his pulses thrill with joy. He was thoroughly enjoying every moment. As the wrestling sun would daily sink out of sight beyond the mountains, he would climb up a big tree for rest during the night; he would ususlly select a trunk from which a few branches simultaneously had shot out.

The wild forest was the safe resort of many types of birds, such as kite, vulture, fowl, waterhen, lapwing, dove, parrot, koel, crow pheasant, small green bee eater, woodpecker, crow, hill myna, flower pecker, etc. Flock of small birds would soar overhead and sing melodious songs. One woodpecker perched upright & ran up & down the tree-trunks in search of insects. One day in a deep jungle of tall trees he saw many bats with heads hanging downwards from the branches of trees. Some chirpy birds were flitting from branch to branch.

One day he flung himself on a pile of leaves. He was scanning the cloudy sky. He was thoroughly in love with the natural environment. The cloud looked like a huge mass of puffy cotton: slowly & slowly the bank of cloud disappeared, and the air became bracing, fresh and crisp.

As he travelled deeper & deeper into the vast wilderness, he saw a valley, a wild open valley full of flowers. The vast valley had a lake at the middle point. The water of the lake was clean & clear; the water rippled. At the centre of the lake stood a hillock. A narrow causeway linked the hillock to the bank of the lake; the causeway was dark, murky, obscure, shadowy and very narrow. It was a secret route. He had an uncannny sense of fear. Ahead lay the first hurdle.

It seemed to him that the crux of the mystery of the

forest lay in the hillock. The isolated hillock was protected by a ring of clear water. Delong did not hastily march towards the hillock. He halted on the bank of the beautiful lake for rest, bath and food. He had to brood over the question: Am I in the right place? and decided to take the last risk. It was worth a try. By the mid-morning of next day, he started crossing the causeway. He trudged cautiously and set every step slowly & carefully. Crossing the causeway and climbing the top of the hillock, he saw a track; walking along the track he found a narrow ravine between boulders of rocks. Delong penetrated further. He was looking around & murmuring. The murmuring was hardly out of his mouth before a stout dog came out with a fierce bark within a short distance of where he was standing. Immediately a young girl came to protect the stranger. The dog obediently stopped barking and stood there observing the stranger. The girl's black and sharp eyes scanned the stranger. She gently asked: What makes you to come to this abode of the queen of herbs & plants?

Delong replied: My innocent love of adventure brought me here.

She said: Welcome, follow me.

Delong followed her obediently and passed through a number of gates; they crept down the narrow passage; they crawled; they strolled through a labyrinthine, zigzag track; and entered into a very beautifully decorated hall. Being directed by the girl, Delong sat there. The girl went inside. Situated atop a hill, the magnificent house was encircled by a low stone wall; it wore an aspect of peace & plenty. A thrill of awe ran through his heart.

After a while, there appeared a maiden of superb beauty, tall, slim, graceful, magnificently attired in very fine clothes. She was the queen of herbs & plants. Her noble mien bespoke her a lady of no ordinary kind. The queen scanned the visitor and came to know his history. Satisfied with his noble character, the queen smilingly

offered him a glass of water; the water had excellent capacity of healing. The queen was not a witch; she had genuine sympathy for all beings. Similarly, Delong was honest to the backbone. This bred a trust between them that ignored formality. The first girl stood looking on with an expression on her face that boded him good will.

Delong was very glad to accept the queen's invitation to spend the night in her residence. He had a sound sleep. The next morning the fear turned to relief as he had not experienced anything awkward during the last night.

By the mid-morning the queen offered him a little quantity of food & drink and then took him to a garden on the eastern side of her residence. This herbarium had very useful creepers, herbs & plants of excellent medicinal value. The queen alone knew the qualities of those herbs. The queen taught him about the qualities of certain plants & allowed him to spend the second night there.

On the third day, the queen led him to another garden on the western side of her residence and explained to him about the latent power of certain poisonous plants. She walked slowly & talked softly,which marked her dignity.

By the mid-morning of the fourth day Delong, with a bag full of useful roots & seeds, turned his steps homeward. When the queen approached to bid him farewell, he could not check his emotion. His parents were eagerly waiting for his safe return. To the numerous questions of his parents & the neighbours, Delong gave evasive replies. But he took care to develop a herbarium and to cure the patients. He became famous and popular. He did not marry. He had a friend named Neurot. Neurot had his wife & children. Delong imparted Neurot a little knowledge of the medicinal plants. One day the two friends set out for the queendom. But Neurot was not allowed to enter into the queendom. Disapponited Neurot returned

home. But Delong never returned home. The queen's last advice was like this: an unscrupulous person should not be in possession of occult powers.

53. Life in a wily woman's family

Long ago in a Garo hamlet lived a family of seven members: mother-in-law, daughter, son-in-law and four daughters, namely Awil, Singwil, Nose, Dimse. The mother-in-law was a cruel, ugly,old woman; she disliked the grand-daughters; she was envious of their beauty.

The old woman was an incendiary and a shrew with a natural instinct to promote quarrels. She was like a poisonous arum plant. Such a person requires an eye-sore. Awil & Singwil were her eye-sores. To disparage them, she was out to manoeuvre a number of plots. She mixed bran & husk with the rice husked by Awil & Singwil; she put hair into the rice cooked by them; she added a quantity of salt with the curry cooked by them; she dropped sand into the drinking water drawn by them.

One day the mother of Awil & Singwil told Awil & Singwil to bring down paddy from the granary, to thrash the paddy with their feet and to dry the rice in the sun and then to draw water from the stream about one hundred feet below the hamlet. The two sisters diligently thrashed the paddy and spread them out in the courtyard to dry. Next, they had to fetch water and to take Nose & Dimse to the stream for a bath. Their parents had gone to the *jum* field. So, Awil & Singwil requested the grandmother to protect the rice from cock, hen, sparrow, dove, pig, etc.

The cruel woman got an opportunity to belittle the grand-daughters; she stashed the rice. Upon returning from the stream, the grand-daughters found no trace of the rice and asked the old woman: Grandmother, grandmother! where is the rice? The grandmother answered: A pig ate up the rice.

It was mid-afternoon. About two hours later, their parents would come back and see the work left undone.

Their mother would rebuke & punish them. So, the two sisters forebodingly brought down another basket of rice from the granary and started pounding them without drying them. They had to feed the grandmother and the two sisters also.

Meanwhile, the parents returned and found them pounding the rice with mortar & pestle. The tired mother asked: What! why you have not yet completed the task? They went on pounding the paddy with an expression of grievance & injury in their face. The grandmother limpingly came forward to add a pincher : leaving the rice unguarded, they went to the stream to dabble; meanwhile a pig and a cock ate up the rice. Now they are pounding another basket of rice.

The two sisters found no time to open their mouths; the angry mother thoroughly beat them. Will your grandmother tell a lie? You were callous and negligent at that time!

That was not the only occasion. Their father had gone to a weekly market. The old woman implicated the two grand-daughters in something wrong. Their mother did not verify & did not give them a chance to express their opinion and rashly beat them and flung them inside a pig-sty for the rest of the night. The next morning the parents left the house for the *jum* field. The two daughters remained confined without food & drinking water.

At about mid-morning, a few children came there to play games with some seeds. During the game, one seed rolled into the pig-sty. One boy went to collect the seed. Awil made an appeal: If you kindly rescue us by opening the door, we shall give you the seed. The boy opened the door and got the seed. The two sisters came out. Awil said to Singwil: We shall no longer stay here. You collect some feathers from the fowl-house. I am cooking rice.

Singwil collected feathers and Awil cooked rice. They ate and sat together. Awil lamented: Why should we remain here! We are the worst victims of the jealousy of

the old woman. Each afternoon our cousin sister comes home tired, but happy to be greeted warmly by the loving grandmother. We find ourselves struggling with the tasks of managing an unkind family. We are writhing with wrenching confrontation. We are not getting any justice even from our mother. Our father is indifferent.Even hell is better than this house. So, let us leave it and take refuge among the flock of doves. Let us stick these feathers to our body and fly away.

Miraculously, the two sisters were transformed into birds. They flew out and met a flock of doves. The doves received them heartily. The entire flock of birds perched on the branches of a tall tree. All the old birds gathered together and comforted the two new birds. The new birds narrated their tragic story thus:

All the lies the grandmother speaks
And tears roll down our cheeks.
We were not in a hurry
To add extra salt into the curry.
We were not of whimsical mood
To put hair into our food.
We were given the task
To take out paddy & to husk.
We asked grandmother to guard
She stashed rice & blamed us hard.
Mother beat us with firewood
With her own hand rude.
All the duties the elders told
We accomplished, gay & bold.
We had been toiling for years
We got blames, beatings & blears.
Now vanished all hope, all respect
We have nothing to expect.

The parents of the two sisters were working in the *jum* field. They heard the tragic song. At first they could

not believe it. The two birds repeated the song twice or thrice. The parents became astonished & worried; they left the work, and hurried back and found the pig-sty empty. They cried loudly and entreated their daughters. In response the birds pathetically repeated the same tragic song! The false blame and the cruel beating rankled in their mind. The parents were little suited to comprehend the jealousy of the grandmother, and to feel in time the consequences of agony of the daughters. All aged persons are not mature & sensible; all children are not childish!

54. How the alienated dog became avengeful!

Long ago animals used to have their own markets; the animals had their own kingdom; the animals used to talk to each other; they lived in amity & enjoyment.

One day, the dog went to a weekly market with a quantity of peas (= *Matar*) for sale. Other animals had their vegetables, roots & tubers for sale; they sold their products. But the dog could not sell the peas. No purchaser came to ask the price even. The customers retreated; because, all the peas were banal, decomposed, fetid, hackneyed and and stale. The dog displayed it to the customers; and tried to touch the hearts of the customers. But in vain! The customers could not tolerate the offensive smell of the rotten, fetid peas.

As time went on, the rotten peas were diffusing the stench. Initially, the neighbouring sellers left that corner of the market. Both customers & sellers were affected. The air of the entire market became redolent with the stench. It evoked reaction. A number of animals protested, abused & reviled the dog and ravaged the shop.

The unfortunate dog went to the chamber of commerce; the tiger was in the chair. The dog made a complaint and sought redress. The tiger showed no sympathy and rather wrathfully cried out: You idiot, get out; you have spoiled the goodwill of the market; how did

you dare to befool the customers? Your fetid peas have spoiled the business of others! The tiger spurned the dog.

The poor, forlorn dog was going back in the evening. The dog was brooding about his fate. No beast lent a sympathetic ear to his appeal!

On the way, the dog came across a man. Observing the pale muzzle of the dog, the man asked: What happened to you? you seem to be in some distress!

The dog narrated the unhappy incident and then said: All beasts hate me; where can I live in safety?

The man said: Do not worry; come with me, live with me. I shall feed you and teach you a counter-strategy.

Henceforth, the man and the dog became friends. They lived together. Alienated from the animal kingdom, the dog shifted allegiance. The wild animal became a domestic animal. The dog started guarding the house and the cattle of the man.

The man had a hobby for fishing and hunting. The man had steady nerves for hunting. And the dog had sharp eyes, ears and nose. The hunter trained the dog in the strategy of hunting. The hunter's traditional weapons, bows & arrows, had limitations too. The dog's efficiency helped the hunter a lot. Reversely, the hunter's steady nerves and weapons helped the dog a lot to take revenge.

Khasia Folk-Tales

55. The Lazy moon

Long, long ago there lived a family of six members: husband & wife and four children. Out of the four children, there were daughters, and youngest of all, a little son. Their names were Ka Sngi (= sun), Ka Um (= water), Ka Ding (= fire), and U Bymai (= moon).

In the beginning, the sun and the moon were equally bright. The three sisters had love and affection for the little brother. The sisters did all outdoor and indoor jobs.

The parents also would not ask him to do any work. There was nothing that they would not have given to the little boy. So, the boy became lazy & licentious, indulging in excessive freedom.

Years rolled on. The little boy grew into a handsome youth. The loving sisters gradually became annoyed with the wayward brother. He had a vein of frivolity which disconcerted the serious minded sisters. He was a foppish masher, a fellow dressing showily to attract the attention of the young girls. As the sun had a fair face, the young brother was harbouring an intention to marry the sister (= sun). The sister got a smell of the intention.

The sun came to know the evil intention of the brother. The sun became very angry. The horror of incest terribly annoyed the sister. The sister contemplated to teach him a lesson. She discussed the matter with her sisters; they, too, supported. One day in presence of the sisters, the eldest sister (= sun) charged him thus: How dare you harbour such incestuous intention; I nursed you. I held you in arms, I fed you. I carried you on my back like a mother does! You deserve a severe punishment. We will besmear ashes over your face.
Then & there the sisters smeared black ashes over the face of the brother (= moon). The besmutted brother left the parental home with his head downcast.
Henceforth, the disparaged moon was having a pale light and black spots. The three daughters remained at home to look after the parents. After the quarrel, the moon went to live separately.

56. Into the valley of death

Formerly, the animals, the birds and the human beings had a common language; it was the language of men; when men talked, others could understand. And the animals and the birds held men in high esteem as the dispenser of justice & as their lord.

One day on an invitation from the lord, all the creatures got assembled and participated in a festival. It

was a festival of dancing, singing & feasting. The participants were in a joyous mood. They were laughing, clapping, screaming, fluttering, dancing and joking.

The sun & the moon were the children of the same parents. The sun was sister; the moon was brother. The sun & the moon came rather late. They too started dancing; but their steps were a bit unrhythmical. So, some of the spectators, like the frog, the mole, the monkey, the owl, etc., were laughing at the brother and the sister; they were talking among themselves jeeringly. The moon & the sun felt sad & insulted and went home. Their home was in a cave, the abode of the dead.

Immediately after that, there was nothing but darkness. Living in the deep darkness was troublesome. All the creatures became worried. It was a chaotic situation, a pandemonium. The lord asked: 'Who will go & bring back the sun & the moon from the cave, the abode of the dead?'
Hearing this, all the creatures kept mum like a picture dumb. One elephant was there; the elephant said: My lord! I shall strive to do the best I can. But I am bulky; however, I shall allow myself to be used in any ceremonial parade after the arrival of the sun and the moon.

Next, the horse, the goat, the tiger, the leopard came forward to strive to do their best.

Soon came forward a beautiful bird, the horn-bill bird. The horn-bill said: My lord! leave this task to me. I am confident enough to convince the sun & the moon. I assure you all.

With the good will of all, the horn-bill went alone and flew & flew down the cave and reached the destination. The sun received the horn-bill coordially. The horn-bill, after taking rest for a while, narrated the appeal of all creatures. The sun smiled. The mischievous smile enchanted the bird. Forgetting the mission, the bird slowly started to woo the beautiful sun. The sun disliked the bird's prattling and gave the bird a good

thrashing. Being insulted, the horn-bill had to leave the place then & there and related his sad experience.

The lord again asked: Who will volunteer for this task? No response came. The lord asked: Who is absent? All looked around and found the cock absent.

The lord summoned the cock. The cock came and made the submission. The cock said: My lord! I am ready to go; I am even ready to sacrifice myself for such a noble cause. But I am a poor bird; I have no dress, no strong tail, no crest, no regalia. If you provide me all these, I shall go on this mission. I shall feel amply rewarded & honoured if you select me as a sacrifical bird in holy rituals. The lord was glad enough to provide the required articles and to accede to the last will.

The cock confidently undertook the long & tedious journey. The cock flew & flew for days & nights to reach the valley of death. The cock was panting & sobbing. The sun was kind enough to receive the cock warmly and offered the messenger seat, water and rich food.

The cock said: Thank you for your kind hospitality. I am really grateful to you. But I am an ordinary bird. I do not deserve such rich food. Please give me a handful of rice & husk.

The humility of the cock pleased the sun & the moon. The sun now asked: Dear sir! will you kindly let me know the purpose of your visit?

The cock explained his mission honestly, and promised to atone for the crime committed by some irresponsible creatures. The cock said: I will sacrifice my life. My lord will arrange to kill me, & offer my blood & flesh to you.

The sun was very pleased with the cock and blessed the bird. The sun & the moon pardoned the criminals; their anger cooled down. They agreed & assured to reappear, and said: Very early in the morning when the red tinge will be visible in the eastern horizon, you alone will be able to forecast my arrival; you loudly announce my arrival.

57. The Tiger and the Cat

Long ago, tiger and cat were children of the same parents. They were wild animals. They had no hearth and home, no winter-garments. They used to suffer from cough and cold particularly during the winter season.

On one dusky winter evening the cat ventured to undertake a long journey for collecting fire from a human settlement. On reaching a house, the cat got the smell of fish-curry. The inmates had been asleep. The cat sneaked through and relished the fish-curry and fell asleep in a dark corner, & cared little to return to its lair.

Late at night, the worried tiger came in search of the cat and growled. The inmates awake and chased the tiger with shouting, sticks and stones. The tiger fled. The cat remained inside and never returned. Thus the two animals got separated.

Manipuri Folk-tales

58. The Sun & the Moon

There was, long ago, a peasant named Pibâ. Pibâ had his wife and children. It was a poor family in the eastern region of Bhârat. A landlord employed Pibâ as his servant, and Pibâ stayed with the landlord for a long time far away from home.

Pibâ's wife had to do all domestic chores: she had to clean the hearth and home; she had to fetch water and bring firewood; she had to make fire and cook food; she had to tend the children and the domestic birds & animals.

Pibâ was honest, dutiful and laborious. He could not tolerate anything causing damage to the interest of his landlord. Though sometimes overtaken by hunger or sleep, cold or heat, he was always loyal and amiable and able.

But at first there was no moon & no night. There were two suns. The common people, and particularly the servants found that living and working always in the light

were very troublesome. The landlords used to take advantage of the continuous flow of light. They would keep their servants almost aways engaged in various occupations. The landlord had his wife & children; they would not let Piba rest. It tormented Piba. He could not go home for a long time. His health deteriorated. He was suffering from a nostalgia.

One day Pibâ fell ill. The landlord came to see the servant. Tears rolled down the face of Piba. The landlord allowed him leave for a few days. Piba spent a considerable period of his life remote from the wife and the children. Now even a short leave animated him. He hurried homeward and at last reached the destination. But alas! the wife was found bed-ridden and the children were hungry. Piba himself was hungry when he reached home. There nothing was ready. Piba was tired and lost his temper. The landlord had given the nominal salary. Piba immediately purchased rice and vegetables and prepared food. After a long time, the members of the family got the pleasures of the hearth & home.

There was a beautiful lake in the vicinity. One day Pibâ's wife had seen a big fish in the lake. She now requested her husband to catch the fish. But how to catch such a big fish from such a big & deep lake? It requires a big net. A simple trap will not do. He had no such net. The wife reported that her father had been in possession of a special net; it had been woven by seven maidens within seven saturdays; the father had been guarding the special net sacredly & secretly.

With a great hope, Piba went there and reported about the sickness & wish of his wife, and humbly requested the father-in-law to lend the special net. The old man was hesitant; but at last agreed and handed over the net with precautions. Piba came back home with the net in a bag of clothes. Reporting the matter to his wife, Piba went to the lake and started casting the net. The net had in it the power of magic. So the big fish was

enmeshed in the net. But Piba failed to bring the big & heavy fish to the shore.

The problem lay elsewhere. It was not a fish. Pâkhângbâ was the lord of the underworld. The lord assumed the shape of the fish. The enmeshed lord was feeling very uneasy. Piba, too, was in great trouble.

The sad news reached the court of Pâkhângbâ. The ministers convened an urgent meeting and decided to summon Piba. Pakhangba had three sons; they hurried to arrest Piba. When they had gone a little way, the youngest son turned back & retreated; but his two brothers, having reached the destination, arrested Piba and drove him to the court. The ministers and judges immediately started asking many questions. The god-fearing Piba narrated all the episodes frankly & freely. The ministers & the judges became pleased with Piba and pardoned him. Not only that, they offered him a golden sickle, a powerful horse and divine power and instructed him to free the fish with the help of the sickle.

Piba, following the advice, cut the net to free the fish. The fish vanished. Piba restored and refunded the net. Hearing the dramatic adventure, the father-in-law did not rebuke the son-in-law.

Piba started practising archery diligently. Within a few days he became expert in archery and riding. He was contemplating to strike the sun.

Every day the sun rises in the east. There was a high mountain in the east. Piba, riding the horse, galloped & galloped & at last went up on to the top of the mountain. Piba lay in ambush. The moment the sun had been rising, Piba made a successful attempt of shooting the sun. The blow became fatal. Suddenly there came down deep darkness. Then the wounded sun was turned into the moon. The other sun remained unhurt. Henceforth, the sun and the moon went on rising alternately. Night was thus made for rest and sleep. Day remained for work. Time was thus divided into day and night. It was a great relief particularly for the servants & labourers.

59. The Lady of Loktak Lake

For a long period, Manipur was a princely state in the north-east corner of Bharat. Long ago, Manipur consisted of a number of small principalities. Moirâng was one of them. The heart of Moirâng was a beautiful & big natural lake called Loktak.

A royal dynasty ruled over Moirâng for centuries. Chingkhu Telheiba was one of the kings of that dynasty; he had no son, no daughter. His brother Chingkhu Akhuba was to succeed; so, he was called *Jubrâj*; he had a beautiful daughter named Thoibi.

One prominent clan had a chief; the chief was surrounded by an aura of brilliance; the chief had friendly relation with the royal family. The chief had a son named Nongban. Nongban was active & energetic.

There was another principality in Khumal. In course of time, the dynasty got reduced; it lost its power & prestige. Purenba was a scion of that dynasty. For his qualities, he was included in the ministry by Chingkhu Telheiba of Moirâng. Purenba had a daughter named Khamnu, and a son named Khamba.

There was another senior minister of Moirâng. He was promoted & became the chief minister. His name was Chawba. He had a son named Feiroijomba. The chief minister had the quality of sportsmanship.

So, Thoibi, Nongban, Khamnu, Khamba, Pheiroijomba belonged to the same generation. They were all contemporaries & competitors, actors & reactors.

One day the chief minister, accompanied by his retinue, set out on an adventure of hunting wild animals in the deep forest. Purenba too accompanied him. In course of the operation, while the retinue started shouting, beating, setting fire, to startle the beasts, one wild animal charged and attacked the beaters. The beaters fled away. The animal rushed towards the chief minister. Purenba stood by the side of the chief minister and struck down the beast, and thus, saved the life of

the chief minister. The horrified chief minister was panting & sobbing. Out of gratitude he wanted to do something for Purenba. Purenba expected his daughter (= Khamnu) to be married with the chief minister's son (= Pheiroijomba). The chief minister agreed.

After a few days, Purenba became ill. The local astrologers, priests, quacks and physicians failed to cure him. So, his health was deteriorating sharply & daily. He died shortly, leaving scanty provisions for the children. The good-natured generosity of Purenba dried up his income. His pocket was like a bottomless basket. When his orphan children had fallen on evil days, the neighbours & relatives did not come forward.

Purenba had casual friendship with a Naga chief. Hearing the sad news, the Naga chief sent a messenger to enquire and if necessary to take the children to his house. Khamnu & Khamba went along with the messenger. There, in the Naga chief's house, Khamnu & Khamba had to do a lot of domestic jobs like sweeping, collecting firewood & vegetables & leaves, cutting jungles, planting, weeding, scaring wild animals & birds from the field.

On attaining adolescence, Thoibi had a cheerful life of freedom & friendship. She had her retinue. They played & wandered about. One day, they loitered along the woods. A love of wilderness & solitude seized the young girls. Thus, they used to wander from hillock to hillock, singing, screaming, laughing and joking. In one such adventure, she met Khamnu. Thoibi took pity on Khamnu and proposed an offer of accommodation in the palace. Khamnu politely refused the offer. Khamnu insisted on staying in the Naga chief's house in the hills along with her younger brother. Being convinced, Thoibi presented her a costly *shawl* clothe and a few other things. The *shawl* clothe had been a gift to Thoibi from Nongban.

Khamnu returned home with a basket full of wild vegetables and the gift. She cheerfully hurled the *shawl*

on to the bed of Khamba. Khamba was glad to receive the costly *shawl* and enquired about the donor. Khamnu spoke a lot about the beauty & magnanimity of Thoibi. So, Khamba could not suppress a desire to see her.

The next adventure of Thoibi was water-sports in the lake: bathing, splashing, swimming, diving & boating. Her father arranged a few small boats. A royal order reserved a corner of the lake for the girls and made trespassing a punishable offence. With all preparations and legal protection, Thoibi with her retinue set out to enjoy the adventure.

From the Naga village, Khamnu & Khamba descended in the pretext of collecting firewood & vegetables. Khamba sat in the shade of a big tree at a long distance; Khamnu jumped into the water and started enjoying the sports with her friends. Khamba was passionately observing the scene and then prepared a raft and started gliding easily & smoothly. As soon as the raft had reached the middle of the lake, a gale blew; Khamba lost control of it; the gale carried the raft into the restricted area. A cruise of the retinue of Thoibi reacted sharply and arrested the trespasser. Thoibi was to decide his fate. Khamnu was in a great dilemma; she gave no sign that she had ever seen and known him before; she pretended, as if, she knew nothing. When he was about to be carried ashore, Thoibi noticed certain marks of identification & pressed Khamnu; and then Khamnu disclosed his identity. Thoibi was considerate enough to order his release. Henceforth, Thoibi and Khamba became friendly. Khamba's personality fascinated Thoibi. But alas! there was another young man who was already fascinated by the charm of Thoibi. He was Nongban.

Nongban came from a prominent family. The royal family & his family were friendly to each other. Nongban was surrounded by an aura of raffishness. The probability of marriage between Thoibi & Nongban was in the expectation of all concerned. Nongban too used to give

her costly gifts. He would stand by the side of the royal family in weal & woe. All these he was doing with an eye to get the hand of Thoibi. But it had no effect now? While alone, the angry youth murmured something which was awkwardish in a polite society. The volatile & unpredictable youth made up his mind to harass & disturb the competitor (= Khâmbâ) by any means, and if possible to suborn him to death. Nongban made several attempts to defame Khamba. He thought of it with such a passionate whim, all through the period, that whenever a crisis came, he was there to embroil Khamba. For a considerable period of time, Nongban alone had been larking about with the girls of the royal family; he was their hero; now he became loathful against Khamba. He hid his disgust. He had at once recognised in Khamba an enemy, a competitor. A rival star was rising in the sky!

The first occasion came with a wrestling match organised in the capital of Moirâng. The news of the match was given limited publicity. So, a limited number of participants came. Nongban knocked them down one after another. His victory was repeatedly applauded. He was about to be declared champion of the match. Knowing the news at the eleventh hour and being inspired by the Naga chief, Khamnu & Khamba came to the ground and after some initial talk with the organisers, were anxiously observing the game. After a hard struggle, Khamba knocked down Nongban. Nongabn left the ground hurriedly and gruntingly.

Now all the eyes of the spectators fell on Khamba. The organisers enquired about the whereabouts of the winner. But Khamba remained silent with a smiling face. On his behalf, his elder sister replied and timely disclosed their true identity. The discolsure came as a pleasant shock to the organisers. Even the king himself came forward and decked him with a garland. The chief minister now recollected the promise and within a few days

arranged the marriage between his son & Khamnu. Thus Khamnu & Khamba again came in the full glare of publicity.

The second occasion came when a red bull had gone mad, committing all sorts of depredations in the hills. Being whispered by Nongban, one fortune-teller (= *Maiba*) urged the necessity of sacrificing the animal, the failure & negligence of which would be followed by flood, famine & pestilence. The royal police struggled, captured & brought the animal to the capital. The bull remained violent. But how to tame the bull? Nongban and Khamba were called in. Both agreed to try their hands and thus to win the credit. In the toss, Nongban got the chance to start first; but he failed; he could not even dare to approach the bull. Then came the turn of Khamba. The moment Khamba & Khamnu had approached, the bull became quieter; the bull got the smell of their hands with which they had fed the bull long ago. They gently caressed the bull's dewlap. The bull was their domestic animal. When they became orphan & unable to feed the domestic animal, they let loose the bull in the jungle. Since then, the bull became savage & vicious. After a long period, the known smell of the kind hands pacified the bull. Khamnu & Khamba humbly requested the king not to sacrifice the innocent bull. The king granted the prayer. The docile bull got a shelter in the capital. Dedicated to Siva, the bull would be seen in the roads of the capital, strolling gracefully & majestically.

The third step of Nongban was the adoption of the strategy of divide & rule to be applied to the royal family itself. Through casual & carefull gossip with the retinue of Thoibi, the strategist came to know that Thoibi was secretly taking utmost care to weave a fine *shawl* for Khamba. Being induced by Nongba, the father of Thoibi demanded the *shawl* for himself as a gift from the daughter. She did not yield to his desire; instead, she assured to weave a new one for the father. The father &

the daughter were unaware of the subtle strategy. So, it brought about an alienation between the father and the daughter. Nongban's strategy became effective to bring about disaster in the near future.

Henceforth, Nongban was no longer alone to teach Khamba a lesson. The annual arrow shooting festival was the fourth occasion. It was a popular festival. In presence of many spectators, several young men used to display their skill in archery. The king, the queen, the nobles, the ministers were kind enough to grace the festival. Having covered his body by winding Thoibi's *shawl* round up, Khamba came to the spot of the festival. He bowed himself to the ground before the king and the dignitaries. Thoibi's father saw the *shawl*; he felt insulted. Nongban's evil mind thus excited Thoibi's father.

The next day, the enraged father ordered to banish his daughter to Burma. Lying to the south-east of Manipur, the kingdom of Burma, many hundred years ago, was a hilly state. The path thither led through hills, jungles, rivers & valleys. Thoibi's mother weft bitterly at the news of exilement. Amid the lamentation of her retinue, the king's men drove Thoibi to the border of Burma.

Thoibi's father next proceeded to inflict a very cruel punishment to Khamba: to trample him to death by an elephant. The order should be carried on forcibly, rapidly, suddenly and in the evening to avoid any public protest. The police and the servants carried out the order. But the elephant got the known smell of the victim's body. Khamba played with the elephant in the Naga hills. The intelligent elephant recognised the friend of the childhood days. The *mahut* also knew that Khamba was innocent. In the pretext of hurling on to the ground for trampling under foot, the elephant caught him with the trunk and moved away hurriedly, under the cover of the darkness, and carefully threw him away in the deep forest.

Thoibi awaited alone in the wild area across the borders of western Burma and eastern Manipur. She longed to see Khamba. She passed the time in thinking & thinking. She was ignorant of the punishment inflicted on Khamba. So she knew: Khamba would come & rescue her by any means. The next day she was walking wearily, about the jungles, waiting for the arrival of Khamba. At night the goddess Panthoibi appeared in a dream and gave the news of Khamba.

Meanwhile, narrowly escaped, Khamba turned his step towards Burma. He knew: Thoibi would be eagerly waiting for him. To attract the attention of Thoibi and to evoke response from her, Khamba was playing on his flute. Thoibi was acquainted with the particular note. It was a tedious journey; he was hungry and thirsty; still he moved forward. After several hours walking, he reached near the border of Burma. Now, Thoibi suddenly heard familiar sweet note. Astonished and cheerful, she uttered a long & loud sound. Khamba replied similarly. They rushed toward each other and met. Their amazement was so passionate that for a few moments they were silent. Cheer to the echo!

Soon they sat together in the shade of a tree; she sat & leaned against the tree with her legs furled & crossed. He lay on the back. She held his head in her lap & gently caressed the face and head, and they held grave deliberation on their fate & future and recollected many memories. They had already suffered a lot. Their eyes had been rudely opened to the cruel deception. They had violent intolerance for a few persons. The deception of Nongban persistently haunted the mind of Khamba; he stamped his foot in anger. But the treatment of Thoibi's father was equally hopeless & ill-judged; she trumpled with rage. Disgusted, they decided to remain in Burma, to make a hut there and to clear jungles for cultivation. Estranged by the force of circumstances, Khamba & Thoibi soon seriously began looking about for a hillock.

From affliction & fatigue they were not, of course, well disposed for work.

Meanwhile, all kinds of rumour were in the air of the capital. The slaves told that Khamba was dead. The grown-up boys & girls cast oblique glances at each other; but they were afraid of making any comment publicly. The old peasants casually expressed their disapproval of the treatment to Thoibi & Khamba. Depressed after being separated from the dear daughter, the father admitted his folly; the mother insisted on bringing back the daughter immediately. Unwisely, the father selected Nongban to be the emissary. The sending of the untrustworthy person provided a painful illustration of the callousness of the father.

Nongban readily agreed; the hope of getting the hand of Thoibi actuated him. Separated from the lover by desertion & death, Thoibi might have been free from the spell of his fascination. Without delay, Nongban cheerfully started. After many hours of walking, he reached the western border of Burma and after a strenuous search found Thoibi & Khamba clearing the jungles of a hillock. He was surprised & shocked to see Khamba alive. There were, however, abrasion, scratches & wounds on his body. Thoibi & Khamba recieved him like an old friend. Both sides had external composure & internal wrath. The cunning emissary soon changed his strategy; he said: Thoibi's mother was weeping & taking no food; the father was respondent; the king was worried; the citizens of the capital were sorrowful; the retinue of Thoibi were very mournful; Khamnu & her husband were griefful, and even the servants were anxious. So, both of them should come back; their presence would pacify all.

The eloquence of the emissary initially perplexed and satisfied them. They listened to his appeal eagerly. They made a few questions. Thus, Nongban got the first round of success. Aparently convinced, Thoibi & Khamba agreed to return to the capital. They turned their steps

homeward; Nongban walked ahead; Thoibi & Khamba followed.

But behind the amity lurked an enmity. They were capable of wronging one another. Keeping a smiling face, Nongban was deeply thinking of an alternative strategy to get rid of the eyesore slyly. But Thoibi & Khamba could not freely talk to each other in his presence. Thoibi thought : Why did my father send Nongban? Why was Nongban so enthusiastic & eloquent? She began looking at the past activities of Nongban. She smelled something mysterious. Her inner voice gave a timely warning. After advancing a distance, Thoibi ogled at Khamba; they decamped into the deep forest. Nongban sadly returned to the capital and reported accordingly.

Regardless of past bitterness, the father now began to think in terms of reconciliation with Thoibi & Khamba. He was hesitant about the suitability of the marriage from the point of view of parentage, birth, fortune and social position. Khamba seemed to be a youngman from another society. However, considering their passion, their obstinacy & their love, the father conceded and sent a member of the royal family to bring back Thoibi & Khamba. This time Thoibi had no doubt. They came back. Thoibi met her parents; Khamba met his sister. It was a great relief to all concerned; they were in excitement and enthusiasm.

Sensitive to the possibility of social ostracism, the father effectively desired to settle the matter very soon with a show of dignity. He proposed to prepare a duel between Nongban and Khamba, and to arrange the marriage with the winner. He duly placed the proposal before the king for a final approval. Fortuitously, news of depredation by a wild tiger came from a village. The king said: Unto him that kills the tiger, will I give the princess Thoibi.

The day after this conversation in the palace, the father took it as the ultimate test. Nongban & Khamba

were informed to get ready; the royal servants were directed to prepare a *mâchân* in the forest. The next day, the members of the royal family sat on the *mâchân*, out of the reach of any tiger. The servants encircled the forest and started shouting, beating & burning the bushes. The tiger came out with a growl. Nongban proceeded first to get the credit of killing the animal. But alas! he failed. Instead, the tiger inflicted a fatal gash; Nongban's mangled body fell.

The turn of Khamba came. Suddenly, the beast, with bristling hair & growling, charged Khamba. Khamba struck the beast. They crashed & watched each other. Khamba leaped to take shelter behind a tree and crouched down. It was a strange scene. The two combatants were engaged in deadly combat. After a few hours of struggle, the beast fell squalling & yelling.

Khamba stood victorious, panting & sobbing. All the beaters assembled around Khamba. The members of the royal family climbed down and highly praised Khamba. The smiling face of Thoibi gave Khamba joy. The villagers stood on both sides of the path to see the hero of the day. The westering sun was sinking beyond the mountains.

Meanwhile, time was pressing. No more delay. No body could answer for what might happen in case of any delay. Thoibi could think of nothing and feel nothing, but her passionate love for Khamba. Fully satisfied, the father determined not to wait any longer, but to start the process at once; the astrologers & the priest soon fixed an auspicious date. Within a week the royal family duly & gorgeously arranged the marrige between Thoibi & Khamba. The priest sprinkled sacred water. The Naga chief, a man of great importance in his village, blessed. The invitees relished the feast.

After the marriage, the couple could have settled in the Naga village; but it was long way further. The king bestowed upon the couple a large tract of land; the land was located near the lake. Moreover, to commemorate

their first introduction, Thoibi wanted to have her house near the lake. So, the royal servants immediately built a traditional house of bamboo structure on the shore of the lake. At long last, Thoibi & Khamba got their own house to live in. The cool atmosphere at dawn and the gentle breeze of the lake in the evening enchanted their romantic minds for a few years.

After that, there arose a suspicion in the mind of Khamba. He began to doubt the fidelity of Thoibi. It was a dangerous doubt, so disconcerting to him that he could not set his mind to any work. He felt that to express even the slightest of doubt before her would amount to an accusation of disloyalty. He was in a dilemma. He sought to test the devotion of Thoibi. He contemplated a plan: a pretension of going to Burma on an errand. So, one day he told her that he would have to go to Burma on a mission of the government of Moirâng. With her consent & good will, he left home & walked a distance & hid in the forest, and under the cover of darkness in the evening he returned; slowly he approached his house in disguise. There was no domestic dog to bark at him. From the eaves, he peeped, stood to eavesdrop, whispered in a nasal twang, cajoled & flirted.

Being alone inside, she was careful & vigilant. She kept a long spear inside the fold of her bed clothes. The mischievous sound at the odd time awakened, alarmed, disturbed and frightened her. Slowly and steadily she held the spear and lay in ambush near the crevice. In disgust, she charged and thrust the sharp spear through the crevice. It fatally wounded Khamba. He fell & gasped 'Thoibi'. She opened the door and found Khamba's mangled body. Her eyes bulged with horror. She dropped the spear from her hand. She burst into weep. Unable to bear the terrible shock, she stabbed herself and sank to the ground beside him! Doubt is a deadly poison in conjugal life.

Bengali Folk-Tales

1. Akula Subha Chandi's ritual-tale (व्रत कथा)

In a certain country lived a poor Brahman family. Being stricken with utter poverty, the Brahman had to go out for begging daily. The meagre alms reduced the family to live from hand to mouth. Disease, poverty and starvation became the world of the family.

Once the Brahman fell ill and for a few days he could not go out to beg. The pinch of hunger became very unbearable. The wife was weeping, and the husband was tossing. So, the benevolent goddess **Akula Subha-Chandi** pitied the family. Disguised as an old woman beggar, the goddess one day came to the house and called out : Jay Radhe, jay Radhe; mother, give alms for Vaishnav. It was noon. The poor wife offered a glass of drinking water and narrated her tragedy. The benign beggar consoled the wife and instructed her: Every Tuesday in the forenoon worship the goddess Akula Subha-Chandi with flowers, *durba-grass*, basil leaf, water, fruit, betel leaf, betel-nut, banana, lamp. Giving the advice, the old woman directed her to close the eyes; when she had closed her eyes, the old woman disappeared.

The poor wife did what the old woman had told her. Soon, she got the result. When the Brahman had gone out before, no one had ever given him a handful of rice. But henceforth, every householder gladly gave him a handful of rice. Not only that, the kitchen garden had enough of arum, brinjal, bean, cucumber, cotton, pepper, pumpkin, mango, jackfruit, plantain, etc. The wife used to prepare wick and sacred thread with the cotton. The sacred threads were highly prized. The fruits and vegetables were offered to the deity first.

Thus, duly worshipping the goddess, the prosperity of the family steadily advanced. Here the Brahman underwent a transformation from an idealist into a

materialist, from a *shattwik* into a *tamashik*, from a disciplinant into an epicurean. Ego and pride came. He detested vegetarian dish and became addicted to the non-vegetarian dish of fish, meat and egg, etc. He denied the blessings of the goddess, and for all his prosperity he gave credit to his efforts & enthusiasm.

One day in the late afternoon, the Brahman went to the local village market and purchased vegetables, fish, meat and egg. But he did not purchase betel leaf, betel-nut, banana, sugar, etc. for the worship of the deity. In the evening he was coming back home with all those things; suddenly a violent gust of wind blew away all those things. He returned home empty-handed. How was it that such natural calamity broke out then and there? Nobody else was affected! It was a mystery. On an enquiry, the wife came to know that the Brahman had not purchased things essential for the worship. The Brahman again went to the market for those things. The Brahman came to his senses.

On another Tuesday, the wife arranged the worship of the goddess. She invited one milkmaid to pay homage to the goddess. But on some pretext, the milkmaid did not come; she neglected. Next day, all the cattle were found dead. The cattle-man and the cattle-woman, beating their forehead, rushed to the house of the Brahman. The wife diagnosed the cause of the mishap and consoled them and advised them to take a vow of worshipping the goddess. The wife accompanied them and sprinkled the sacred water of the jar of worship. To their astonishment, the cattle came back to life. They were delighted. They, too, started the worship.

One day in the evening the Brahman went to the weekly market. All transactions were damped by downpours and mighty thunder. The rain was falling heavily. The sellers and the purchasers were shrieking. The current of water was flowing forcefully below their feet. Their keen eyes were accustomed to darkness &

deluge. The Brahman was returning amidst deep darkness. He was silently uttering the holy name of the goddess. A tigress lay in ambush. When the Brahman had been passing along the rural path, the tigress jumped and growled to gobble him. The Brahman warned the beast not to harm the devotee of Akula Subha-Chandi. The tigress said : I am in crisis. My husband has been caught & caged by a hunter. I can forbear & spare you, if you pray before your goddess for the release of my husband. The Brahman consoled and assured her. True to his word, the Brahman and his wife humbly prayed. Surprisingly, out of gratitude, the two animals came to the courtyard of the Brahman very early in the morning with rich presents and left immediately.

Thus, the name and fame of the Brahman spread far & wide. It reached the ear of the king. The king's agents went there with palanquin to bring the Brahman to the royal court. The Brahman was feeling honoured at the invitation. The king and the queen welcomed the Brahman in a befitting manner. The king wanted to know the mystery behind the name & fame of the Brahman. The Brahman said: *Maharaj!* it is a miracle. The ways of the god are indeed wonderful. He recounted his own history and narrated the greatness of Akula Subha-Chandi reverently. Bright with the light of a great happiness, the Brahman was confident of the solution of any problem of the king also. The king then told : We are in mental crisis. My son is missing. I have engaged all my energies & agencies to find him out; but failed. If your goddess is merciful enough to grant my prayer, I shall worship the goddess with all respect.

The Brahman added : *Maharaj!* I am completely convinced and dependant on the goddess. If you sincerely and seriously pray, the goddess will definitely restore your dear son. I shall certainly pray. You, too, pray.

Curiously enough, however, the following morning the prince was found walking alone homeward about half

a mile from the palace. In wonder and delight, the royal guard rushed to bring the prince. The parents came to the gate to hug the son. The Brahman was engaged to perform the worship of Akula Subha-Chandi.

2 Ananta Vrata's ritual tale

Long, long ago there was a Brahman named Sumantu. He married Bhrigu's daughter Diksha. Sumantu & Diksha had a daughter named Sila. They had a peaceful life.

After a few years, Diksha fell ill. Her illness increased to the great anxiety of her husband & daughter. At the eleventh hour, she was taken outdoors & laid upon the floor; the water of Ganga River, the sacred leaf and milk were offered; the *Gita* was recited. She breathed her last. The funeral rites were performed.

Now, Sila became almost orphan. She used to play with the children of the neighbouring houses. She used to draw pictures of gods and make clay models & idols and worship those idols.

But, Sumantu married again. And the newly married wife was a shrew. She could not tolerate Sila. Sila could understand the step-motherly treatment; she would tolerate and digest. Sumantu was henpecked. Taking advantage of the situation, the step-mother would often depreciate and disparage Sila. Sumantu was a husky man.

Time rolled on. Sila became adolescent. Sumantu was in search of a bridegroom. One day one young man named Kaudinya, being thirsty, came to the house of Sumantu; he saw Sila and proposed to marry her. Sumantu arranged the ceremony as simply as possible. Sumantu had a desire to give a quantity of rice, a few clothes & ornaments to the daughter as wedding gift. The step-mother violently turned down the proposal of giving the customary gifts and concealed the ornaments; her grimace, her punnage created paranoia in the mind of Kaudinya. With a tearful eyes, Sila left her parental home with her husband, Kaudinya.

The newly married couple had to cross the river Yamuna in order to reach their destination. Being tired & thirsty, they went to the river to bathe. On the bank of the river they saw an assemblage of women. It was the 14th day of the month of *Bhadrapad*; the women were performing the *Puja* of **Ananta-vrata**.

Sila asked : Sisters! what are you doing ? One woman answered : We are performing Ananta-vrata. Sila asked : What is the benefit of this *vrata* ? Another woman replied : The devotee's desires are fulfilled. Sila questioned : What is required to perform the *vrata* ?

Sila instantly took part in the worship and offered her scanty provision of dry-food as oblation to the god. The women sang & danced in honour of the god. And then they relished the *prashadam*. Sila and her husband resumed their journey. After a long & tedious journey, they reached their village. Reaching the new home, Sila found it full of provisions : rice, paddy, pulses, vegetables, dress & ornaments. Sila found herself in peace & prosperity.

Days, months & years rolled on. But, Sila did never forget the blessings of the god Ananta. She continued to perform the *vrata* solemnly & secretly. As a mark of performance of the annual ceremony, she used to put a sacred thread round her arm. She used to entertain the guests & the neighbours. Thus, she became very popular. Kaudinya had no fixed income. Still, the family was solvent!

Prosperity without hard labour has a degenerative effect. Kaudinya became wayward. Perhaps, Sila did not bring her solemn & secret devotion to the notice of Kaudinya. Kaudinya, too, was careless; he did not enquire about the mysterious income! He became lazy through luxury. One day Kaudinya was surprised to see a fourteen-knotted thread round the arm of Sila. He became suspicious. He became adamant to know the mystery of the thread. He asked: Tell me the meaning;

perhaps it contains magical formula to make me henpecked.

Sila earnestly submitted : It contains no magic, no spell; it is a simple mark; it is a memento of the worship of the benevolent god Ananta.

Kaudinya angrily replied : Damn your Ananta. I dislike all these feminine rituals.

Immediately, he snashed and snatched the sacred thread and threw the thread into fire.

Sila rushed and rescued the half-burnt thread and preserved it into a pot of milk. She tended to beat her forehead. He frowned, spoofed & left home struttingly & came back in the evening.

Time rushes onward like a stream. The woman of the neighbouring homes gathered and sat with Sila comforting her. Roaming here & there aimlessly, Kaudinya returned after dusk. Meanwhile, there was none to bring back the domestic animals from the field. Taking this advantage, some thieves decamped with the cattle. On the following night a few burglars stole all ornaments. Only a few relatives came to console; but they quarrelled, abused & left. The elders cuffed him; the youths pommelled him; the villagers refused to give him alms. To complete the cycle of misfortune, one day just at noon a mysterious fire reduced Kaudinya's house to ashes. The villagers rushed to help, but before the terrible fire nobody dared to proceed forward. The misfortune of Kaudinya became the topic of popular remark & gossip.

Kaudinya had no particular notion about the cause of his sudden distress. But, Sila had her belief. Abused, beaten & criticised from all corners, Kaudinya now came to his senses and asked Sila about the cause of the crisis.

Sila said : This is an act of god Ananta. You deserve it for your misbehaviour. Kaudinya repented and left home in search of the god, Ananta. Again, he became equally desperate to find out the god. Leaving behind houses

and fields, he reached a very dense forest. Much of his decisions were decisions hot from the mind, and much of his talk was glib lacking depth.

Deep in the forest, he came across an old mango tree; the tree was full of ants & insects. Kaudinya stood there & asked the tree : I am seeking Ananta Dev; have you seen him. The tree replied : I have not seen him.

Next, he saw two adjacent lakes full of flowers, plants, water and birds. He asked the lakes : Have you seen the god Ananta? and got a negative relpy. He swilled a quantity of water, and went ahead. He met a donkey and an elephant and asked them the same question and got a negative reply. Kaudinya moved further and saw a cow, and asked about the god Ananta and got no positive hint. Moving ahead, he saw a bull, and asked the same question and received a hopeless reply.

Walking had risks, as the trails had luxuriant growth of creeper, grass & thorn-bush. Snakebite was another risk. Distressed & depressed, the young Brahman decided to commit suicide. He climbed up a tree & perched on a branch and made preparation to hang himself. Meanwhile, an old Brahman suddenly appeared there and sat in the shade of the tree. The intelligent & good humoured old man directed Kaudinya to climb down. Kaudinya came down & sat and devoutly knelt & prayed for guidance. The old man asked : What are you doing here in this deep forest? The young man said : I am preparing to hang myself. The old man said : Do not act rashly; please indulge in heart-searching; you are likely to have committed a gross mistake.

Kaudinya felt a touch of fatherly affection; he could not check his emotion. He went on narrating his own history. After that, the old man remarked : You are responsible for your suffering. Your arrogance, your laziness, your atheism are at the root of your suffering. Do not blame others. Do not misbehave with Sila. Allow her to worship the god Ananta. You too worship the god

for fourteen years. It will wash off your sin; you will get back your peace of mind as well as prosperity.

Getting a satisfactory answer, the young Brahman wanted to know about the history of the mango tree and the two lakes. The old man explained : In his previous life, the mango tree was a Brahman; but he was fraud; he did not teach his students sincerely & effectively. The two lakes were, in their previous life, two sisters; They used to love each other; but they were very selfish & cruel; they would not give alms to any beggar. The donkey was a very angry man in his previous life; the elephant was a very arrogant man in his previous. The cow was an epicurean man in his previous life.

The old Brahman led the young man to a cave. The interior of the cave was a big, beautiful garden full of plants, flowers and fruits. The god Ananta sat on a majestic throne and his four arms had four emblems : Conch, wheel, mace & lotus. The young man was fortunate to see the god for a moment. The old man disappeared.

The young man became puzzled for a few minutes. With a conviction that the old Brahman had been the god Ananta himself, Kaudinya turned his steps homeward. On the way, he replied to the inquiries of the lakes, elephant, donkey, cow, mango tree, etc.

Returning home, he found her virtuous wife worn out, eagerly waiting for the husband. The return of the native consoled her. He admitted his fault and promised to worship the god Ananta. The couple devoutly started to perform the Ananta-vrata. And one after another the friends, the neighbours started visiting his house. Again, the family became peaceful & prosperous.

3 Andheswari's ritual-tale

There was a village on the eastern bank of the mighty river Meghna. A peasant lived in that village. The peasant had his wife and seven sons and seven daughters-in-

law. The peasant had agricultural lands, cattle, domestics and ponds. The family was a fine example of peasant life.

At first, all went well. The daughters-in-law were doing their work in a spirit of co-operation and good will. There was a team-spirit among them. Quite naturally, the young wives were not all alike. The youngest wife was frank & free, simple-hearted and beautiful. The first six wives were jealous of her. However, they were cautious; they did never reveal it expressly. Their mental life was manifested on one occasion.

It was their daily duty to fetch water from the distant pond. They used to go to the pond in the afternoon. To-day they had a lot of chores. So, they went there in the evening. The first six wives promptly washed and filled in their jars, and hastily turned their steps homeward, leaving behind the youngest wife. The youngest wife was slow; she was behind the time. She was left behind; she lagged behind.

The path was dark and opaque. She sank into the tangle of fear. She sat down and went on weeping. Meanwhile, a benevolent deity, in the disguise of an old woman, appeared there. The deity was kind enough to come in time. The old woman asked : Why are you crying ? The youngest wife with tearful eyes explained. The old woman consoled and advised her to mutter the name of **Andheswari** and to remain hidden inside a bush. The divine protection was full-summed; neither snake nor dacoit could do any harm to her. Her safety & security were assured by Andheswari. Her husband came and searched from a distance, but could not find her out.

Next day, in the morning she returned home safely with her jar of water. While the parents-in-law had a sleepless night, the six wives hypocritically chuckled internally, and exhibited anxiety externally. The deceitful, double-tongued wives further confused the matter; they secretly manipulated a plot and whispered

it to their respective husbands. They cooked a slur on the character of the youngest wife. They meant to imply that she had been kidnapped & raped by some ruffian.

The youngest wife was forced to undergo an oath & ordeal. How? At night a bag full of coins would by placed near that pond & on the way to the pond : the presence or absence of the treasure would serve as a test of character; if it would remain untouched by any dacoit or deity, her chastity would be proved. Accordingly, arrangement was made. The young wife muttered the sacred name of the deity with all devotion. Her chastity was proved. The reputation of Andheswari Devi was established.

4 Ashtalokpal Thakur's ritual-tale

In a certain country lived a king who had one queen and one daughter. The palace was at the centre of a spacious garden with a few quarters all facing inward. There were windows, gates, eaves, ponds, plants and gardens.

In that small capital there lived a miserably poor Brahman. The Brahman was a widower; he had two little daughters, named Rumna and Jhumna. The Brahman used to get up very early in the morning for doing all household jobs. Feeding and nursing the little daughters, he used to go out to beg. Amidst the hardship, however, he never relaxed for a day his habitual vigilance, discipline and duty. Days, months and years rolled on. The daughters grew up. Now, they were doing the household jobs. It was a relief to the father.

But the life of the Brahman was following the old traditional routine. He had to go out to beg in the morning and to come back at noon. One day he did not return till late afternoon. It was an unusual delay. The daughters were very worried. They got a handful of unhusked paddy in the jars. They took the grains in a tray and placed the tray in the open courtyard for sun-drying. They had a mind to husk the grains and to prepare a meal. However,

being very anxious, they went to the palace for reporting. The royal guards consoled them, but could not give any information at that moment. They soon came back home and found that the crows & sparrows had eaten the grains. Anxious, hungry & helpless, they were weeping.

Meanwhile, there came a female beggar; she was old, feeble, sickly and weak; she had a wallet and a stick. She said: Oh! grand-daughter! I am thirsty and hungry, and give me water & alms. The daughters felt very sorry for the poor woman. They went inside and found only two grains. They offered drinking water and those two grains. The old woman wanted to know the cause of wretchedness of the family. The daughters narrated the sad history of the family. The woman took pity and advised the daughters to put one grain inside the cooking pot and to offer one grain as alms. The woman advised them to worship **Ashtalokal Thakur** daily and duly. Narrating the rules of the ritual, she directed them to clean the eyesore with palm. At that very moment, the woman vanished suddenly.

The two daughters had opened their eyes and found the place vacant; the woman disappeared momentarily. She passed away from the courtyard leaving the daughters happy. Their hovel was turned into a beautiful house; the cooking pot was full of rice; their jars were full of grains.

When the Brahman had gone out before, no one had ever given him a handful of grain or rice. But to-day every householder gladly gave him a handful of rice and vegetables, etc. Then he turned his steps homeward in a joyous spirit though he had been overburdened. He was confused, hesitant and astonished to see the beautiful house. The two daughters went together to the gate to welcome the father. Their joy knew no bound. They ate together. The daughters narrated the story of the arrival of the old woman. They came to the conclusion that Ashtalokpal Thakur had come disguised as a beggar. From

that day onward they started to worship the deity with all devotion. Thus, the prosperity & fame of the family steadily advanced.

Ever since the first domestic tragedy occurred about a decade ago, the Brahman overcame many troubles in order to nurse and protect the two little daughters. Now, the blessing of the deity made him popular and prosperous. He gave up begging. He resorted to the hereditary profession of priesthood. Begging injured his health and fame. Prosperity & peace proved to be recuperative.

The two daughters became very active, energetic and considerate. They made friendship with the king's daughter. The three friends had many occasions to enjoy the pleasure of conversation spiced with play, gossip and sing. Gradually, the two daughters began to think seriously about the life of their father. Upon the death of their mother, the Brahman had to bear hardship. Upon the marriage of the two sisters a few years later, who would look after him? He would be all alone ! The last years would be saddened by loneliness. He had devoted his time & energy to the upbringing of the daughters. Now, it was the turn of the daughters to think about the last days of their father. They indirectly insisted on the remarriage of their father. The father denied at first; but repeated insistence put him in dilemma.

Presently, in the royal place, the queen was seriously thinking about the marriage of her daughter. The king, with the ministers and other dignitaries, was very busy. The problems of administering a kingdom kept him preoccupied. War, famine, flood, disease & death became his world. The king had to take an active & leading part in governmental affairs. So, the king had little time for domestic affairs. But the queen's pressure & persistence rather forced the king to curve out time. The king wondered to see the pretty princess and promised to arrange the marriage according to the earliest opportunity, preferably tomorrow.

The royal discretion and declaration put the queen in a great crisis. She did not expect such a quick response. It threw her into confusion. The mother and the daughter put their heads together. They were not ready to leave such a major issue to chance & accident. After much delibration, their choice fell upon the Brahman. They knew the family quite well. The queen sent one trustworthy guard to call in Rumna & Jhumna. The two sisters were surprised and happy to know the considered opinion of the queen.

The two sisters, accompanied by the guard at night, came back home. They prostrated before the small shrine of the deity, Ashtalokpal Thakur. Then they, falling on their knees, entreated their father to agree to the proposal. After much solicitation, the father agreed. Next day, very early in the morning the daughters and the father awaked. They bathed and worshipped the deity. It was still dawn, and the crimson tinge was glowing in the east. The song of birds awoke the king and the queen too. The Brahman, dressed in fine attire, confidently made his way into the royal garden within the palace compound. He was the first man to be seen by the king. He was called in. The king chose him. Upon the announcement of the selection, a great preparation was made. In the evening, amidst pomp & pleasure, the marriage was solemnised.

5. Baidyanath Thakur's ritual-tale

Once upon a time a poor Brahman family lived in a certain village. The family consisted of three members: the Brahman, his wife and his son Yadu. Yadu was blind right from the date of his birth. The Brahman's premature death caused by malaria impeded the usual life-pattern of the family. The widow once thought of taking refuge in holy Vrindavan which was crowded with devotees, Brahmans, cows, monkeys and widows. He dropped the idea thinking about the lot of the son.

Now began a life of tremendous hardship on the part of the widow. There was poverty all around. Drought, cyclone, famine and epidemic would come alternately. The widow had a gruesome life. She had to eke out a livelihood and to nurse the blind son. The mother & the son had to live on leaves, arum, roots, tubers and gruel. She sold out her ornaments & utensils. At last all the meagre resources were exhausted.

One day there was not even a single grain in the house. The mother was weeping. The hungry son repeatedly demanded food. Great was the sorrow of the mother. She lost control over her nerves; her rage knew no bounds; taking an old broomstick she had thrashed the son soundly till he hobbled out of the house howling with pain & tears.

The poor and blind boy sat in the shade of a big tree which stood by the side of the village path. The boy sat & fell asleep until midnight. Now, it happened that on that very night Siva & Parvati were passing along the path. Siva and Parvati were passing in the disguise of old man & woman; they saw the boy and took pity on him. Hearing their conversation, the boy roused from sleep. They asked him : What ails you ? Why you are here till midnight ? The boy answered and lay prostrated before them. Siva & Parvati pitied him and advised him : You and your mother should regularly & devoutly worship the god **Baidyanath**. The god Baidyanath will restore your eye-sight and remove your poverty.

Yadu took the dust of their holy feet. In the twinkling of an eye, the gods vanished. Yadu got back his eye-sight. Full of spirit and hope, Yadu came back home and told his mother : Mother! mother! you turned me out, but Sri Sri Baidyanath Thakur has blessed me with eye-sight and good fortune. The mother out of repentance, hugged her son; very early in the next morning, they rose up, bathed, plucked flowers, leaves and started worshipping the god Baidyanath. Since then, they lived happily.

6 Bipad-Nasini's ritual-tale

A few stories, illustrative of the greatness of **Bipad-Nasini Devi**, are as follows :

1. The story of *Maharaj* Dharmadev

In the ancient city of Avanti (modern Ujjain in Madhya Pradesh) lived a king named Dharmadev. The king and queen were benevolent and pious. The god-fearing royal family had the tradition of worshipping Mahamaya Devi daily and devoutly.

One day the Devi wished to have a wide publicity of her another form, the form of Bipad-Nasini. This model or mould was least known. So, the deity hit upon a plan. The Devi confounded the thinking-process of the queen. The queen was obviously unaware of the design of the deity. Nobody in the royal family knew it. The queen did not keep the king informed of the psychic change.

The queen who had been a naturally virtuous lady, now turned into a notorious woman indulging in tastes disagreeable to the royal family. Her devotion to the deity went on decreasing. The domestics, the maids, the sweepers, the attendants became the friends of the queen. The degenerous queen became alienated from the courtly manners and etiquette. Upon being requested by the queen, the sweeper's wife, secretly bought and brought a quantity of beef for the queen.

One trustworthy servant of the king chanced to see the forbidden meat. He privately informed the king. The saddened king did not see with his own eyes the outrage perpetrated on his own household. The king was busy with administrative problems. The king summoned the queen and sought an explanation. The queen denied the charge and replied that the sweeper's wife had supplied flowers only. The queen assured the king to show the flowers after the worship.

The queen thought herself saved for the moment. But an extraordinary tension overtook her. In case of her failure, the king would order to place her on the

pointed stakes and kill her. The king had his spy all around. It was very difficult to hush up and suppress it. To come out of the danger, out of the life-and-death question, the queen very, very earnestly went on chanting the name of the deity. She prostrated herself before the altar of the deity. That day, she took no food, not even water. With complete devotion & dedication, she prayed and got her heart's desire. Bipad-Nasini Devi magically & mysteriously transformed the lump of beef into flowers & fruits.

The ways of the deity were wonderful. Being recovered from the danger and tension, the queen opened the door of the temple and came out with the basket of flowers. The king was happy to see the flowers & fruits. But the queen henceforth started to worship the deity in the form of danger-averting goddess.

2. The story of a poor Brahman

In the ancient city of Kasi in northern Bharat, there once lived a poor Brahman named Satyaban. The name of his wife was Abhaya. They were honest, pious and god-fearing. The priestly job and begging were the two means of their livelihood. The Brahman resorted to the two means alternately. They were devoted to each other perfectly.

One day the Brahman set out in the morning for begging alms from door to door. The wife, after doing the domestic jobs, sat down watching the path along which her husband would come with the wallet of alms. The interval between the two times was of a few hours.

Meanwhile, an ascetic came to beg alms. The wife had nothing to give as alms. The ascetic had no idea about the extreme poverty of the family. So, he insisted on giving alms. It was against etiquette to refuse & reject such a prayer. The wife, being in a dilemma, stood up to welcome the hermit and offered a glass of water. While she had been inside the kitchen for bringing water, she beat her forehead and murmured. However, at the time

of offering water, she struggled to maintain a smiling face. But behind the apparent generous hospitality, there was a violent inner commotion! Nevertheless, Abhaya could not long resist her emotion. She fell down on the courtyard, tossing & weeping. The wallowing woman did not forget the name of Bipad-Nasini Devi.

The hermit was not at all prepared for such a tragic situation; he stood perplexed and numbed for a moment. According to his norms of behaviour, he could neither run away nor touch her. In an embarassing situation he went on visibly consoling the woman from a safe distance.

Just about that time, the benevolent goddess appeared in the disguise of an old, grey-haired woman with a stick in hand. The old woman asked : Abhaya! why are you weeping? what ails you? do not weep; tell me. Abhaya cleaned tears & laved her face with water and replied. On hearing the reply, the old woman consoled & assured and confidently directed Abhaya to bring a handful of rice for the saint. Abhaya hesitatingly went in and amazedly found the jar full of rice and came out smilingly with enough of rice for the saint. The saint blessed & left.

The two women sat together and discussed many problems. Abhaya was no longer crazy with difficulty & despair; she became happy & grateful; she humbly enquired the identity of the old woman. The woman said: I am distantly related to you; your mother was my cousin sister; our parents were different. I travelled a long distance; so, prepare food & curries for all of us. Abhaya was glad to give food to the aunt, but she had no vegetables. From her facial expression, the aunt understood and again directed Abhaya to inspect the kitchen room. This time Abhaya hopefully went in and amazedly found the basket full of vegetables.

Abhaya came out with the good news and requested the aunt to go to the nearby pond for bathing. In the meantime, Abhaya would quickly cook. At the time of

cooking, the thought of clothe and utensils for the aunt came to the mind of Abhaya. In this case also, the aunt's blessing worked wonder. Abhaya found a bundle of new clothes stashed in a corner of the house; and a few new plates in the kitchen room.

Satyaban was yet to come back. Abhaya was cheerfully & eagerly waiting for Satyaban. She was rather counting every moment. The age-old tradition dictated Abhaya to feed the husband first, and thereafter the two women would eat together. The old aunt knew it, but she had a different design; she insisted on eating together before the arrival of Satyaban. Abhaya had to submit to the insistence of the aunt. The two women ate together and afterwards fell asleep on a mattress laid on the floor of the cottage.

Waking in the mid-day, the kind-hearted aunt gazed upon Abhaya sleeping sweetly and crept away silently & quickly. After a while, upon waking, Abhaya found herself left alone, but found the cottage astonishingly turned into a beautiful house, and the mattress transformed into a bed of roses, and her husband watching the new house wonderfully; Abhaya enthusiastically narrated what had happened.

Thrilled by the divine blessings, Satyaban, flinging the wallet then & there, hastened and wandered through the villages & forests in search of the aunt. He rummaged. Tired & hungry, Satyaban travelled & travelled, till he came to a lonely place and sat down in the shade of a spreading banyan tree. And there, after enduring hour upon hour of earnest desire & devotion, Satyaban was blessed. One youthful damsel of superb beauty came there and asked Satyaban certain questions. Satyaban passionately replied. The damsel said : It is difficult to see the deity, but I can suggest you procedures & principles to have the blessings of the deity. Satyaban agreed. The damsel said : Go to the locality and collect flowers, sacred leaves, fruits, sweets, oil, earthen lamp,

pot, worship the deity. I shall wait till your arrival. Satyaban had a coin of one rupee tugged in the waist clothe. He readily followed the advice. After bathing in stream water, Satyaban sat down to worship the deity, Bipad-Nasini Devi. Sitting at a little distance, the damsel was watching the rite. But every attempt of Satyaban to offer flowers at the altar of the deity would fail; instead the flowers would automatically reach the feet of the damsel. It surprised Satyaban. Satyaban humbly wanted to know the identity of the damsel. The damsel smiled and disclosed her true identity and advised Satyaban to remain truthful and faithful to Bipad-Nasini Devi. Satyaban devoutly knelt and prayed for blessings. The moment Satyaban prostrated & bowed to the Devi touching the ground with the eight parts of his body, the goddess vanished.

Satyaban was now basking in the sunshine of the divine favour. Fortune smiled on him. Satyaban delightfully turned his steps homeward. But no sooner had he turned homeward through the deep forest, than he faced a danger. A lion lay in ambush. With a loud & defeaning roar, the lion jumped and stood on the path. Never had Satyaban seen such a ferocious beast. Satyaban fell down and lay almost dead. However, the lion took pity on Satyaban and sat calmly by his side. Satyaban came back to consciousness. Then the lion said : My wife left me; I am suffering from the pangs of separation. You are fortunate to receive the divine blessing. Kindly arrange our re-union. Satyaban said : How can I be of any service to you? I may try only! With those words, Satyaban chanted the holy name of Bipad-Nasini Devi and put vermilion & oil on the forehead of the lion. Surprisingly, within a very short time, the lioness appeared. The happy couple thanked, stood away and allowed Satyaban to go home.

The jubilant devotee returned home. Satyaban and Abhaya now achieved their heart's desire. They went on

devoutly worshipping the goddess daily. But the lion did not forget the kindness, and the lion was thinking of repaying the deep debt of gratitude. The chance came : one day the king's servants were carrying the royal treasures along that mountainous path. The lion took the opportunity; ambushed with his retinue and howled & roared suddenly. The servants, flinging the treasures, fled frantically. The lion decamped with the treasures. Waking at the dead of night, & their minds fully made up, the lion & the lioness descended to the human settlement and found out the house of Satyaban and offered the treasures.

Satyaban and Abhaya were now blissfully happy, each absolutely devoted to the other. And both of them were completely devoted to the goddess. To that idyllic condition were added their honesty, fellow-feeling, discipline and integrity of character. Thus, the family became the focus all eyes.

When their news came to the king's ears, the king sent a messenger to Satyaban. As soon as he had received the king's message, he started on the journey and presented himself before the king. The king welcomed Satyaban and wanted to know the mystery of his name & fame. Satyaban humbly admitted the role of the blessings of the deity. The king told him that the power of the goddess would be put to the test. The king's son was missing for a considerable period; all attempts failed to find out the prince. The *devi's* power could be of the greatest service to the king in such an urgent case. Satyaban must fulfil the royal demand or lose his life.

Satyaban replied that he would try; but sought a few days' leave for the purpose. Taking the king's permission, Satyaban came out of the palace and returned to his own place. Abhaya was eagerly waiting. They discussed about the matter and resolved to worship the deity for a solution of the special problem. At the end of the rite, the couple, very solemnly prostrated before the altar of

Bipad-Nasini Devi touching the ground with the eight parts of body. To their delight, the missing prince appeared then & there. Satyaban welcomed the prince & offered him food & fruits and afterwards led him to the palace. The king favoured Satyaban with valuable gifts.

By the grace of the goddess, the couple became the parents of a son. The paean of public praise bestowed upon the family. Days, months and years rolled away, and the child completed first five years of his age. From Abhaya, the son heard the stories of his maternal uncle's house. The curious son desired to see the maternal uncles. So, one day Satyaban and the son went there bedecked with costly dress & ornaments. Now, one greedy maternal uncle had a retinue of rogues. Those swindlers & tricksters made a plot to cheat the guests under the pretence of a picnic. Satyaban agreed, little dreaming how fateful the picnic was to be to him & to his son. There in the deep forest, the cheats gripped the mouth of Satyaban & his son to prevent any outcry and then killed them. The criminals decamped with those ornaments & money.

On the scheduled date Satyaban did not return with the son. It worried Abhaya. Meanwhile all sorts of wild rumours were in the air about the assassination. It reached the ears of Abhaya : Where he went? What became of him? By whom he was slain? Abhaya immediately rushed to the house of her parents and from there to the picnic spot.

By that time the shocking news had spread like a wild fire. Hundreds of people swarmed and followed Abhaya and thronged the picnic spot. In presence of the anxious crowd, Abhaya chanted the name of Bipad-Nasini Devi and sprinkled sacred water on the dead bodies. To the wonder and astonishment of all, the unfortunate victims got reanimated and opened their eyes. They got up as it were from a trance. Great was the joy of Abhaya,

her husband and son and the crowd assembled at the sudden miracle. They all came back shouting in praise of the *Devi.*

7 Dhanya Purnima's ritual-tale

In a certain country lived a rich Brahman. He was a landlord. He had his wife & children, agricultural lands, cattle, domestics, ponds, temples. The landlord's court was the centre of socio-economic and religious activities. All the big festivals would be celebrated here and the villagers would gladly participate. Wealth came to the family instantly.

That day five festivals were scheduled to be held: dedication of a large tank, dedication of twin ponds, landgrant to a Brahman, first feeding ceremony of the son, and Dhanya Purnima-vrata. The first four ceremonies were celebrated devoutly and gorgeously. Thousands of villagers were invited in the feast. But the annual worship of the Dhanya Purnima-vrata passed unnoticed & unobserved. No one took any notice of the *vrata.*

The neglected deity decided to teach the landlord a lesson. The benevolent deity now became malevolent. The blessings of the deity were at the root of the Brahman's prosperity & popularity. After being rich, he became a little ungrateful; he lost the balance & sanity of mind; his ego, his self-assertion now became powerful & prominent. All donations and dedications were indeed ego-centric.

Sometime afterwards, the landlord lost all his riches and became very poor. The elephants, the horses, the cows, the ducks, the fishes, the pigeons died. The barn, farm, the store-room became empty. All the domestics & servants ran away. The house lost all its grandeur & splendour. The forlorn fate of the Brahman became the common topic of gossip of the villagers. Those, who had benefited from his lavishness, were the very ones who avoided him in his distress. He bemoaned; but he did not cringe to his friends for help.

Leaving his wife and son at home, the wretched Brahman, out of anguish, volunteered for exilement. He travelled & travelled without any fixed point of destination. With a cane-stick in his right hand, and a wallet hanging from the left shoulder, he was wandering alone aimlessly.

On the way, the Brahman came across various categories of people. He came to know the sorrows & sufferings of others also. On the first day he came across a vendor of betel leaf. Formerly, his business was running quite easily. Now, he lost all customers; all his efforts to disburden the basket of betel leaves from his head failed; it was unbearable & painful to go with the load on the head. But why? The vendor asked : *Thakur!* why are you leaving your home? Where are you going? The Brahman recounted his history and told that he was going in search of the god to know the cause of his destitution. The betel leaf vendor requested the Brahman to know the cause of his wretchedness, and farther reminded the Brahman to put a knot in a corner of clothe as an aid to memory.

On the second day, the Brahman came across a woodcutter. For a considerable period of time, the woodcutter was unable to unload the burden from his shoulders; nobody came to purchase the bundles of firewood. The Brahman and the woodcutter talked to each other about their sufferings. The woodcutter asked the Brahman : Sir! where are you going now? The Brahman replied : I am going in search of god to know the cause of my trouble. The woodcutter entreated : If you find the god and know the cause, then kindly ask the god about the cause of my dejection. The Brahman assured. The woodcutter requested the Brahman to twist the corner of his clothe into a knot as a reminder.

On the third day, the Brahman was about to cross a river. There near the river *ghat* (= landing stairs on the sides of a river or lake or pond) a crocodile was found. The poor crocodile had half of its body in the water, and

half on the shore; the body was stuck there; the crocodile failed to plunge into the water. The villagers got the scope to beat the crocodile. The tired Brahman sat there, washed his legs & hands. The Brahman and the crocodile had a long conversation. The crocodile asked the Brahman: Where are you going? The Brahman answered: I am going in search of god to know the cause of my distress. The crocodile appealed : If you meet the god and know the cause of your distress, kindly on my behalf ask the god about the cause of my mortification. The Brahman consoled and assured. The crocodile requested the Brahman to twist the corner of his clothe into a knot as a mark.

On the fourth day, the Brahman came across a milch cow. The milch cow was suffering from the heavy burden of her big udder full of milk. The calf avoided the milk. The milk was not oozing out. No milkman came to squeeze milk from the cow. The cow was lowing in pain and her bell clanking. The Brahman and the milch cow spoke familiarly. Being requested by the cow, the Brahman assured the cow and twisted his clothe into a knot as a reminder.

On the fifth day, the Brahman reached a village market. There were a few well-stocked groceries; certain quarters were marked for certain goods; the fish & meat market had stench. The tiny shops in temporary sheds, huddled almost together in rows along both sides of narrow lanes, thronged with sellers & purchasers, had stocks of various goods & vegetables. Haggling produced reverberations all over the market & the noise was heard from a distance. It was evening. There were myriads of bamboo-torch (= *chunga batti*). In that market two merchants were in great trouble: one oilman and one vendor of lime. Their business was going very very dull. All people and purchasers avoided them. They approached the Brahman. The three had a discussion about their problems. On the appeal of the businessmen, the

Brahman assured them to enquire about the cause of their despair, and twisted two knots in his clothe.

On the sixth day, the Brahman, leaving behind human habitations, came near hills and forests. The hungry & fatigued Brahman sat in the shade of a big mango tree. The fruitful tree was overburdened with numerous sweet mangoes. Animals, birds, human beings did not even touch its fruits during that season. Not a single mango fell down below. Why? asked the tree! The afflicted Brahman disclosed his own agony. Knowing the purpose of the Brahman's travelling, the tree exhorted the Brahman to know the cause of its problem. The Brahman assured and twisted his clothe into a knot for the sake of memory.

On the seventh day, the Brahman entered into the deep forests. The misfortune shattered his health, but not his spirit. In the forest the Brahman came across a wild elephant. The elephant was in distress. While devouring the wild banana plant, the two long trunks of the elephant penetrated deep into the plant; being unable to draw out the trunks, the poor elephant stood entangled for days together. The elephant did not know the cause of the distress. The Brahman too opened his mind. Then the elephant requested the Brahman to be kind enough to know the cause of the distress as well as the remedy. The Brahman assured and twisted his clothe into a knot.

The Brahman tottered along and groaning, stopping at intervals as he had been fatigued, and then going on again. The forest was lonely. Those, who had expected some redress, did not come part of the way with him. The rough path had ups & downs. He was at a loss : what to do? where to go? He sat in the shade of a big banyan tree and fell asleep. When he had roused from sleep, he found a grey-haired old Brahman standing nearby. The poor Brahman felt sure that the stranger Brahman could give some valuable information, if he were approached

in the right way. After listening sympathetically to the history of the wretched Brahman, the stranger smiled and consoled. In answer to the inquiries of others too, the stranger smiled and assured. In great suspense, the distressed Brahman devoutly kneeled and tearfully prayed for guidance. The white-beard old Brahman now replied to all the inquiries thus :

1. The landlord Brahman family had committed a serious mistake : five rites were scheduled to be held; the first four were performed; but the Dhanya Purnima-vrata was not held.
2. The betel leaf vendor cheated & swindled one female worshipper of the Dhanya Purnima-vrata. The woman cursed.
3. The woodcutter did not give firewood to a poor female worshipper of the Dhanya Purnima-vrata.
4. The crocodile swallowed an ornament of a female worshipper of the Dhanya Purnima-vrata.
5. The milch cow kicked one female worshipper of the Dhanya Purnima-vrata. The woman did not get milk.
6. The lime vendor, cheating one female worshipper of the Dhanya Purnima-vrata, took exorbitant price. The woman cursed.
7. The oilman sold adulterated oil to one female worshipper of the Dhanya Purnima-vrata. The woman cursed.
8. The mango tree did not give its fruit to one female worshipper of the Dhanya Purnima-vrata.
9. The elephant threatened one female worshipper of the Dhanya Purnima-vrata while she had been collecting banana leaf.

The old Brahman suggested certain remedies :

1. The landlord Brahman should devoutly perform the Dhanya Purnima-vrata.
2. The betel leaf vendor should donate betel leaf to an honest Brahman.

3. The woodcutter should donate firewood to an honest Brahman.
4. The crocodile should vomit and donate the ornaments to an honest Brahman.
5. The milch cow should donate milk to an honest Brahman.
6. The lime vendor should donate lime to an honest Brahman.
7. The oilman should donate pure oil to an honest Brahman.
8. The mango tree should donate valuable treasures hidden beneath its main roots to an honest Brahman.
9. The elephant should serve an honest Brahman for twelve years.

Giving all necessary instructions, the old Brahman vanished suddenly & surprisingly. The wretched Brahman was feeling well that day, hopeful, cheerful, ambitious and confident. To the wretched Brahman, the white-beard Brahman was Sri Sri Thakur in disguise. Knowing the cause of troubles, the wretched Brahman delightfully turned his steps homeward. On the way back, he met the sufferers one after another.

1. The elephant was eagerly waiting for an answer. The elephant asked : Oh priest! have you seen Sri Sri Thakur? Have you asked the cause of my suffering? The Brahman replied; Yes. I have seen Sri Sri Thakur. Sri Sri Thakur said that once you threatened a female worshipper of Dhanya Purnima-vrata while she had been collecting banana leaf. The woman cursed; that was the cause of your suffering. You should serve an honest Brahman.

The elephant said : You have seen Sri Sri Thakur; what Sri Sri Thakur has said is surely correct. So, you are the honest Brahman. I shall serve you, come, ride on. The moment the Brahman rode, the trunks were released. Riding on the elephant, the Brahman proceeded.

2. The mango tree asked the question and got the reply and offered the treasure.
3. The oilman asked the question and got the reply and offered pure oil free of cost.
4. The lime vendor asked the question and got the reply and offered lime free of cost.
5. The milch cow asked the question & got the reply and accompanied the Brahman to offer milk.
6. The crocodile asked the question & got the reply and vomitted the ornament for the Brahman.
7. The woodcutter asked the question and got the reply and offered firewood free of cost to the Brahman.
8. The betel leaf vendor asked the question and got the reply and offered betel leaf to the Brahman free of cost.

The Brahman returned home with a lot of wealth. The situation again became rosy. He took the greatest delight in devoutly performing the Dhanya Purnima-vrata. The neighbours again became frequent visitors to the house. They too started the worship.

8. Garai vrata's ritual-tale

There was once a poor Brahman in a certain country. The Brahman had his wife and an only son. The family was dependent on alms. The family was living from hand to mouth.

But the family was not long destined to live a simple life. The Brahman's wife once fell ill and died. Many villagers came to the house to express their sympathy and some elderly neighbours suggested the widower to marry again.

Now, began a life of hardship. The widower had to do indoor and outdoor jobs. It was his daily duty to feed his child in the morning, and he himself would eat either stale rice or fried rice, and then to go out for alms, and at last to come back home at noon for food & rest. Year after year went on. The son grew up. The father arranged the marriage of his son.

In those days the villages were apart from one another. Between every two villages there were fields and forests and streams. Density of population was thin. Flood, famine, epidemic and attacks & invasions would horribly enfeeble the people. The Brahman often used to sit in the shade of a big banyan tree while going out for begging.

And now entered on the scene the sinister figure of a charming damsel. She took a curious interest in the family affairs of the Brahman. She used to meet the Brahman at noon in the shade of the banyan tree. Day after day rolled on. Slowly happened an episode of extraordinary importance: introduction gradually turned into intimacy & acquaintance into attraction. She continued her efforts for over months and made all sorts of kind proposals to him. He was asked whether he would be treated kindly & intimately during his illness in old age by the son and the daughter-in-law? He was asked to leave the responsibility of earning to the son! Initially; the Brahman obstinately refused to say a word in answer. But slowly and gradually he became infatuated and obsessed. He felt that the son would be disloyal to him and the daughter-in-law would be hyprocrite. The Brahman was no longer frank & free and transparent to the son & the daughter-in-law.

The Brahman swallowed the first bait of the damsel. The alienation was almost complete. Having estranged the father from the son and the daughter-in-law, the damsel started the second round of her game. She tried to indicate the futility of observance of rites & rituals; of vows & worships. The observance was a great handicap to happiness & well-being; cleanliness, washing, whisking were symptoms of mania; vegetarian diet was a torture on the body. One should eat fish, meat, egg and enjoy this life. Here also the damsel's influence had its affect on the Brahman.

Being deprived of judgment & inspired with sensual passion, the Brahman now started quarrelling with the son and the daughter-in-law over trifling issues. He himself stopped observing the vows, rites & rituals, and prevented the son & the daughter-in-law from cleaning, worshipping, rising at dawn, etc. So, they had to do all these things during his absence.

The evil impact was already well under way. The damsel now made the proposal of marriage. The field had already been made ready. The Brahman became aware of the need. The repressed impulse came to the level of conscious desire. He agreed to the proposal. The long period of amour, and fear of social ostracism led him to a dilemma. But he could not resist the temptation. In the evening, after taking the meal, he disclosed his desire. The son and the daughter-in-law reluctantly and tacitly consented to the proposal. The next morning the Brahman eagerly went out for begging and at noon sat in the shade of the tree and passionately expected the arrival of the damsel. As usual the damsel came, and the Brahman gave the good news.

It was the month of *Aswin* (= September-October). The Brahman talked to an astrologer. The astrologer studied an almanac and found the last day of the month of *Aswin* auspicious for marriage. The Brahman himself informed and invited his friends and relatives.

Meanwhile, the reluctant & hesitant son secretly made consultation with a few wise men and Brahmans of the locality, and he was convinced about the untrustworthiness of the damsel. She was Alakshmi in the disguise of a damsel. Now what should be done to protect the family from the curse of Alakshmi in the disguise of a damsel? How to prevent her entry? How to disillude the father? How to bring about a peaceful solution without resorting to violence? How to maintain the unity of the family?

The socially approved method was to resort to magic,

witchcraft and sorcery. The magicians were the primitive physicians & philosophers. Accordingly, the son solicited the service of an *ojhai*. Being advised by the elderly well-wishers, the son had to take a few steps: to intensify cleanliness, to stick to the traditional rites & rules; to allow the marriage to be solemnised; to enclose & encircle the homestead with the spells of magic; and to discourage begging by the father.

On the appointed date, the marriage was solemnised in the shade of the banyan tree in front of the temple of a village deity. Strangely, nobody knew the whereabouts of the damsel. Even the Brahman did not ask ? On the third day, the Brahman was to come back home with the new wife. They were in two separate palanquins. The moment the bearers were about to cross the boundary of the magically protected homestead, a mighty eerie terribly broke out; to the wonder of the Brahman and to the tacit delight of others the new wife died; the dead body of a black crow was found inside the palanquin.

9 Hari-Parameswar's ritual-tale

Long, long ago Menaka had a beautiful garland of fragrant flowers. She presented the garland to Durvasa. Durvasa presented the garland to Indra. Indra placed the garland on the head of his elephant, Airavata. The elephant threw it on the ground. It enraged Durvasa. Durvasa cursed Indra & his retinue. The Devas were afraid of being afflicted with disease & death.

Taking advantage of the adversity, the Ashuras started preparations to torment & torture the Devas, to plunder & devastate the Devaloka.

The alarmed Devas made an appeal to Brahma. Brahma suggested the Devas to collect all sorts of medicinal plants for crushing & churning with the help of the Ashuras. The great exercise would result in the production of *Amritam*. The *Amritam* would make them strong & deathless.

Putting a huge quantity of various medicinal plants in the sea of milk, the Devas & the Ashuras started churning the sea.

As the churning went on, a number of objects arose, such as Kamadhenu, Parijatam, Apsaras, Chandra, Garal, Dhanvantari with *Amritam*. Mahadev Siva swallowed the venom. The Ashuras snatched the pot of *Amritam* & fled away.

The Devas approached Vishnu for the recovery of *Amritam*. Vishnu assumed the form of Mohini. Mohini approached the Ashuras. The Ashuras were captivated by the beauty, flirtation & amour of Mohini. On Mohini's advice the Ashuras sat down and closed their eyes. Mohini was expected to serve *Amritam* to every one of them. Meanwhile, Mohini vanished with the *Amritam*.

The Ashuras opened their eyes and found themselves betrayed. They chased but failed to catch Mohini. Rahu went ahead & sneaked into Devaloka. Surya & Chandra detected him. Vishnu cut him. The invigorated Devas defeated the Ashuras.

The deadly poison of the Kalakuta snake was to have a horrible affect. On Brahma's request, Mahadev Siva gulped it down, but stopped it in his throat. So, Siva became Nilakantha. Not only that, when Mohini had been fleeing with *Amritam*, Mahadev Siva, in a moment of ecstasy, embraced Mohini. The flickering moment of the joint image found its expression in Hari-Parameswar.

10. ITU Puja's ritual tale

There lived a poor Brahman family on the bank of the holy river Ganga. The family consisted of four members: husband & wife and two daughters, Jumno & Umno. The family was dependent on alms. Almost daily, the husband used to worship the family god and then set out for begging and come back at noon.

Days, months & years thus passed on. The winter season came. The sun lingered shorter in the sky. During

the night dew-drops dripped off the leaves & roofs. Preparation used to begin for celebrating Paush-Sankranti.

During the winter season, in December & in January, the local people used to prepare various types of cakes & sweets. The poor Brahman used to get the smell of those cakes. So, he, too, became very eager to relish cakes. He asked his wife to prepare sweet cakes. But she had no fine rice powder, banana, molasses, milk, sugar, etc. The Brahman begged & collected the essential materials.

His wife was happy to prepare cakes. Long before dawn, she sat frying cakes one after another. The husband had suspicion; he surreptitiously went on counting the number of cakes prepared. After the preparation, they went to sleep again.

In the following morning, the daughters craved & longed for cake; out of motherly love, she gave two cakes only and warned not to ask for more. In the morning the husband got up and bathed and sat to eat all the cakes. His wife served the cakes. He found that there were two cakes missing. He became angry and consumed the cakes. He did not offer even one cake to his wife. He was a greedy man.

The greedy husband did not stop there. He became vindictive. He pretended to visit the house of a relative, and took the two daughters along with him. They walked a long distance and crossed fields & villages. The relative's house was supposed to exist beyond a deep forest. It was already evening. They entered the forest. Being exhausted & thirsty, they sat in the shade of a big banyan tree. The daughters fell asleep. The cruel father deserted the two daughters then and there, and quickly turned his steps homeward. He had no penitence. The mother had no voice.

After about two hours, the two wayworn sisters awoke and found themselves helpless in the midst of deep forest. They heard the howling of the beasts. It was very difficult

to move either backward or forward. They became afraid and perturbed. The helpful banyan tree offered them shelter. They climbed up the tree and spent the night.

The next day they moved forward and reached a place near a river; they found a few women worshipping a god. They narrated a heart-rending tale of their journey. The women received them kindly and consoled them and listened to their tragedy. They offered them temporary shelter & food. They taught them the procedure of worshipping the goddess **Itu**. Being convinced about the material benefit of worshipping the goddess Itu, the two sisters returned home and started the *vrata* and got the benefit. The sober daughters did not take revenge against the wild father. Rather, the insincere & cruel father changed his tone.

The family became solvent and happy. One day the king and the minister of that kingdom came to visit that part of the country. They became thirsty and sent for drinking water. The two sisters supplied water in a small pitcher. The small pitcher was deserving of disregard & neglect. But its inexhaustible source was striking. The king and the minister became fanciful and proposed to marry them.

The king married Umno. The minister married Jumno. The poor girl suddenly found herself surrounded by attendants & servants and in the midst of plenty & pleasures. So, Umno was at a loss; she suffered from schizophrenia. She neglected the worship of the goddess ITU. Consequently, the royal family suffered distress one after another. The king ordered to behead Umno. The royal executioner took her to the lonely field of execution, and out of merchy handed her over to her sister Jumno at night. Umno lived there incognito.

After the marriage of the two daughters, the wild father, like a dog's curly tail, reassumed his old character. He felt proud of being the father-in-law of the king and of the minister. He used to ramble & strut. He was

surrounded by a few retinue. He utterly neglected the *vrata* and spurned the sacred pitcher. Soon, the consequences followed. Day by day, he became poorer & poorer. The neighbours neglected him and refused to give alms. He went to the house of Jumno. Jumno gave a good quantity of rice & pulses & spices. On the way, Itu's emissary mysteriously looted those gifts.

Next, the wayward husband sent her wife to the house of Jumno. Jumno was careful & affectionate. The mother and the two daughters met together; they were not, however, allowed to swerve and behave waywardly. Jumno kept them within limits and imposed certain restrictions. They were asked to go to bed early and to rise early and to worship the goddess Itu. They stayed there till the month of *Agrahayan* (November-December) and performed the annual worship of the goddess Itu.

Discipline & devotion bore fruits. The goddess brought to the mind of the king the memory of Umno. The king became eager to see Umno, and ordered the minister to restore her. The minister found the braggart order extremely difficult to comply with. The dejected minister came back home and went straight to bed. Jumno cautiously wanted to know the cause of depression. The minister explained. Jumno confidently disclosed the fact of Umno's presence in incognito. The minister became happy to have a sound sleep and to assure the king the next day.

The king arranged to decorate the avenue with banana plants & flowers. And Umno promised to worship the goddess regularly. Their mother and father also promised to worship the goddess Itu.

11. Kalkinarayan Thakur's ritual-tale

There was a village on the eastern bank of the mighty Meghna River. And there dwelt a poor Brahman with his wife. His income from priesthood and begging was meagre & uncertain. So, the couple had to live from hand to mouth.

The Brahman's wife was active, energetic & practical. A Kayastha family lived in the neighbourhood. The prosperous Kayastha family had agricultural lands, cattle and domestics. Every day in the morning the wife used to collect a quantity of fresh cowdung from the cow-shed of the Kayastha family. It was her usual duty to sweep the courtyard with a broom in the early morning and then to sprinkle cowdung mixed with water. She used to save a little quantity of cowdung for manuring the kitchen garden. It added to the income of the poor family.

In the rural countryside everybody's business was known to everybody. The villagers used to visit the houses of the neighbours in season and out of season. The wife used to covertly collect a little more quantity of cowdung than what had been essential for sprinkling. The extra quantity of cowdung was used for commercial purpose. In the countryside there had always been different types of character : honest, foolish, simpleton, sincere, cruel, whisperer, miser, plotter, dunce. One such hypocrite secretly informed the Kayastha family about the covetous acquisitiveness of the Brahman's wife. The Kayastha family first observed, then dissuaded and at last protested.

The wife fell ashamed and dishonoured. The disgraced woman reacted violently at her own home. She proposed to sell her utensils & ornaments for the purchase of a milch cow. The Brahman shared the sentiment of his wife. The Brahman carefully set out for the market with the ornaments and utensils.

On the way the Brahman met a peasant. The peasant's old mother fell seriously ill; she was about to die; her last wish was to donate a milch cow for a safe passage over the Baitarani River. The peasant requested the Brahman to accept the donation. Fortune seemed to be favourable! The Brahman gladly & readily accepted the milch cow and blessed the dying mother. With a splendid spirit, the Brahman came back home with the milch cow and the ornaments & utensils.

Abruptly and directly, the family's financial position improved. It soon became the talk of the village. The Brahman was aided greatly by his wife. She played an important role in the improvement of the family's financial position. After having gone to a good deal of hardship, trouble and disgrace, the wife enthusiastically took care of the milch cow and the calf. The excess quantity of milk and cowdung was sold honourably and confidently.

The Brahman family had a very poor neighbour : the husband fell ill & died leaving behind his widow and an only son. The Brahman family took pity and employed the widow & her son as domestic. The boy's duty was to take the cow to the field for grazing. There was a big banyan tree on the bank of the river. The cowherds & village boys used to sit and play in the shade of the tree. One day the boys fell asleep, while their cattle went far away. They awoke and did not find their cattle. They shouted and cried. They were anxious and worried.

Seeing the weeping boys, the kind-hearted **Kalkinarayan Thakur** came there in the form of an old Brahman and addressed them : Grandchildren! why are you weeping? Are you afraid? Do not be afraid. The boys told the cause of their weeping. Then Kalkinarayan Thakur advised them to worship the god Kalkinarayan Thakur. The boys asked : Grandfather! grand-father! what does one gain by worshipping Kalkinarayan Thakur? The grand-father replied: Whatever one loses, he will find; one's desire will be fulfilled. The timid and simple-hearted boys promised to worship the god. To their wonder and delight, the entire herd of cow were then seen coming homeward. It was a great relief. So, the boys, without any delay, arranged the worship of Kalkinarayan Thakur that very evening.

Since then, the worship of the god became a weekly affair. The boys used to visit only five houses to collect

five betel leaves and five dottles of tobacco only. The place of worship was not fixed. The time of worship was fixed : in the evening. It was a simple ceremony spiced with singing, dancing, joking, smoking, etc. Soon the worship of Kalkinarayan Thakur became an occasion of gaiety & social festivity.

Now it happened that on one evening the term of the Brahman's domestic boy came; all his friends assembled at the courtyard of the Brahman. Upon the completion of the ritual, the boys were chewing betel leaves and smoking tobacco. They relished it as *prashadam*. Meanwhile, the Brahman returned home, and saw the boys chewing & smoking. The Brahman became irritated & furious; he hurriedly kicked & spurned the altar of the god. The sensation was enormous throughout the village. The boys fled.

Now it happened that on that very night the Brahman's cow & calf vanished. The Brahman searched for the cattle and asked every body : Have you seen my cow & calf ? The common reply was: No. He went on asking and reviling the boys. The Brahman accused the boys and sought justice from the Gaon Panchayet. The Gaon Panchayet summoned the boys, and gave a hearing to the accuser and the accused. After due deliberation, the Goan Panchayet dismissed the charge and directed the Brahman to arrange the worship of the god, and to humbly invite the boys in the worship.

The troubled & perplexed Brahman then & there invited the boys and the members of the Gaon Panchayet, and arranged the worship in the evening. The jubilant boys ranted the air with the praising sound in honour of their dear god. A lame man and a blind man came, tossed & wriggled in front of the altar. Surprisingly they became cured. To the wonder and delight of all present, the cow and calf appeared, on the completion of the worship. The deity's reputation was established.

12 Kankhaila Thakur's ritual-tale

Once upon a time an old woman was suffering from earache. For a remedy, she took a vow of devoutly worshipping the presiding deity, namely **Kankhaila Thakur** on the last day of the month of *Bhadra*. Kankhaila Thakur was a malevolent deity.

The old woman requested one woodcutter to supply firewood, and one milkmaid to supply milk. But on the appointed date the woodcutter forgot to supply firewood, and the milkmaid forgot to supply milk. The poor devotee fell in trouble. However, she had will power and tenacity. She rushed to the houses of the neighbours in search of firewood and milk. The neighbours were kind enough to offer her firewood & milk. She made a simple arrangement for the worship of the deity with all her heart. The deity was pleased with her sincere devotion. With the divine blessing, she became cured.

But a strange thing happened. The negligent woodcutter had gone to forest; there he fell ill and became unable to move; he lay unconscious. The milkmaid's crisis was of a different type : all her cows & calves lay dead in the cattleshed.

The village-life was violently agitated. All sorts of wild rumours were afloat in the air. The woodcutter was brought in, and an *ojhai* was engaged to cure him. Similarly, an expert in animal disease known as Goala, was engaged to animate the cows. But all failed. None of them could say how it happened. So, a great chaos & confusion followed.

Some people suspected the possible curse of the old devotee to be a cause of the crisis. So, the people went to her house and expressed their anguish in patois. Then the old devotee said : I humbly requested the woodcutter to supply a bundle of firewood; but he neglected and deceived me. Kankhaila Thakur became displeased at this. I humbly requested the milkmaid to supply milk : the milkmaid assured me; but on the appointed date she

took no care to supply milk. Naturally, Kankhaila Thakur became displeased at this.

Then the villagers realised that the negligence of duty had been the chief cause of the crisis. An old man suggested the members of the badly affected families to make a vow of worshipping the deity. In presence of all, the members of the two families made a solemn vow of worshipping the deity. Instantaneously, the woodcutter and the cows & the calves got back to life. The villagers were delighted.

13. Karmapurush Thakur's ritual-tale

There was once a Brahman in a certain village. The Brahman had his wife and two daughters named Sonai and Rupai. The family had homestead, agricultural land, pond, cattle and the hereditary profession of priesthood. The family was neither poor nor rich. The Brahman had a happy family and a moderate income.

Suddenly a domestic tragedy occurred. The wife fell ill and died. It was a severe blow from which the family never fully recovered. Sonai & Rupai were mere children then. The Brahman had to play the double roles. The struggling life tended to have an evil effect on his mind and character. It led him away from devotion and duty. The debauched Brahman ceased to command the respect of the neighbours and the devotees. It badly affected his profession. He was reduced to a pauper. He sold his agricultural fields. And at last began begging.

Year after year went by. The Brahman had already injured his health by doing home work and farm work. It was too heavy for him. His ill temperament & poor health frequently forced him to give up work for recuperation. Upon the earnest appeal of the daughters, and the suggestion of the neighbours, the Brahman married for the second time. However, for such a widower, it was difficult to have a beautiful bride.

The poor Sonai & Rupai would not get time for rest; they had to live in stern severity. They had to perform all

dcmestic chores. One day the step-mother took a quantity of broken grains in a tray and placed the tray in the open courtyard for sun-drying and directed Sonai & Rupai to guard the grains. The Brahman went out for begging; the wife was sleeping inside. Meanwhile, the sparrows and the crows swooped down and gulped all the grains. The screaming of the birds awaked them. They scared the birds. But the damage had already been done! Being afraid, they went on weeping.

A benevolent deity pitied on the poor girls. The god came in the disguise of an old Brahman beggar. The beggar said : Oh grand-daughter! why are you crying? The grand-daughters narrated their tragic history. The beggar consoled them and asked them to search out a few grains. They found only three grains. The beggar counselled them to put the grains in three pots, one in each pot or jar. In addition, the beggar advised them to worship **Karmapurush Thakur** on the last day of the month of *Jaishthya*.

Giving the advice & blessing, the beggar vanished. Fortunately, that day was the last day of *Jaishthya*. The two sisters bathed and collected flowers, leaves, water, twigs, etc. and sincerely worshipped the deity. To their surprise and delight, the three jars became full of grains, and their cottage was turned into a beautiful house.

When the Brahman had gone out before, no one had ever given him a handful of rice. But to-day every family gave him rice and vegetables, etc. He was astonished to see the beautiful house. The two daughters narrated what had happened; now the family became the devotee of Karmapurush Thakur.

The family's prestige & position increased steadily. The homestead was developed into a pleasure-grove. There were fruit trees and garden of flowers. The bumming of bees, the fragrance of flowers and the screaming of birds added to the peace & prosperity of the family. The Brahman's wife desired to enjoy the pleasures

all alone with her husband. The wife, a selfish woman from the beginning, made a plot of inventing a story of crime which would seem to imply that the two daughters had been either culprits or possessed by some evil spirits or seriously ill. With that evil intention, earthen jar shreds were secretly & stealthily strewn on the bed below the quilt. When in drowsiness, the two daughters were to toss, the murmuring sound would be heard. The sound was interpreted by the step-mother as the proof of her suspicion. She used to whisper; often she had irritation causing the teeth to grind together over any mistake committed by the step-daughters in doing anything.

The Brahman's personality was paradoxical and weak. He was henpecked. There was an impression of acquiescence on his face spiced with meanness. Nevertheless, being abetted by the wife, the Brahman plotted to banish the daughters. The hypocrite father told the daughters : My dear daughters! your step-mother has not been treating you affectionately; so, I shall take you to your mother's sister's house, and you stay there for a fortnight, and then come back. The next morning they started. It was a long journey. They travelled and travelled for hours on foot. They had to pass through a deep forest. The sylvan & shady paths were narrow, nasty & zigzaged, up one slope of the hills and down the other.

There was a very big banyan tree by the side of the hilly path. The two sisters were very tired; they fell asleep. The opportune moment arrived. The father tore his umbrella and tainted it with some reddish liquid and left it there; it was a testimony to an attack by a tiger. Leaving the sleeping daughters in the deep forest, the father very speedily turned his steps homeward. The wretched daughters, faint with fear & fatigue, were awakened by the screaming of the home-coming birds. Meanwhile, darkness had set in. To Sonai, it was not at all an accident & attack; it was a betrayal, a crime, a conspiracy, a dodge. There was no human settlement in the vicinity. With all devotion & dedication, they

repeatedly, uttered the name of Karmapurush Thakur for rescue. The benevolent banyan tree slowly lowered one of its long & tall branches down to the level of the ground. The two sisters carefully sat on the branch and tied themselves to the branch with clothes. The tree again slowly raised its branch high above beyond the reach of any beast. They spent the night there silently & sleeplessly.

Mysteriously, the next day a prince and a police commissioner's son went out for hunting; being very tired those two hunters sat in the shade of the banyan tree. The two sisters saw the two handsome young hunters. They dropped their long hair. One hair fell in front of the prince's feet; another hair fell near the feet of the police commissioner's son. It surprised them; they saw upward and found the two sisters. Being assured, the two sisters climbed down and narrated their tragedy. The hunters disclosed their identity. The poor sisters accompanied the hunters and reached the royal palace. The king consoled them and duly arranged the marriage. The prince married Sonai; the police commissioner's son married Rupai.

Despite her post-marital affluence, Sonai did not abandon the pre-marital practice of worshipping the deity with cheap & ordinary materials like flower, leaf, grass, water, earthen pot, mango-twig, broken rice, etc. Success, but not monetary reward, attended her efforts; she had been rescued and married quite honourably. Now, in the interior courtyard of the palace, Sonai, without any bustle & stir, was silently & solemnly arranging the worship of the deity with those cheap & ordinary materials. The prince unexpectedly went there and saw the poor & unimposing ritual; to the prince it was below the dignity of the royal family. The prince reviled Sonai and spurned & kicked out the altar & the materials. The angry prince ordered the guards to take her into the forest and to kill her there. Following the order, the guard & the

executioner took her into the forest; she was weeping. The kind-hearted guards felt very sorry for her; they left her in the forest and warned her not to come back into the palace.

Sonai, under the cover of the night, had wandered & wandered and at last reached the house of Rupai. Rupai and her family accepted & consoled Sonai and kept it strictly secret. To the attendants & domestics, she was the friend & relative of Rupai. The family of Rupai continued to be peaceful & prosperous.

But the picture of the royal family soon became pathetic. The royal family was going rack & ruin. The prince suffered from leprosy. The aged king convened a meeting of his councillors & counsellors. After much deliberation, they accused the prince whose arrogance & haughtiness had brought about the tragedy. The decision of the court was communicated to the prince. The repentant prince asked the guard & the executioner; they said : If you promise not to punish us, we shall tell you. The prince promised, and then they told him that they had not executed the capital punishment. The prince directed them to go to the house of Rupai and to beg pardon on behalf of the prince and to enquire about the whereabouts of Sonai. The elders of the family of Rupai maintained a meaningful silence and commented that for such serious problem the prince himself should have come. The royal guards went back and conveyed the comment. On hearing the comment, the king sent the prince. The prince had to regret and to promise before the elders. Then, Sonai appeared & accompanied the prince. The prince became cured. The royal family regained its peace, prosperity & popularity.

The notorious step-mother and the henpecked father, too, had to suffer a lot. They were reduced to beggars. The trees of the garden died. The birds left. The couple were starving. But they did not come to their senses. The news of their wretched condition reached

the ears of the daughters. There was a great gap. The father did not know the condition of the daughters; they might have been killed by a wild beast long ago.

One day, Rupai came to the house of Sonai. The two sisters had now peaceful family life. They discussed among themselves about the condition of their father. They planned to distribute clothes, grains and money among the beggars. With this plan, they approached the prince and the king; the prince and the king approved and arranged it on the auspicious day for the worship of the deity.

One day the henpecked father heard that the king of that country wished to distribute clothes, grains, rice and money particularly among the beggars. So, he decided to go to the capital and receive the donation just like common beggars. The two sisters were observing; when their father had come, they identified him. But they didnot disclose their own identity; they fell back & sent a guard to bring him inside. The poor father was trembling. The father was astonished & delighted to see his daughters. The daughters offered him water, good clothe, fruit and food. The royal guards brought the step-mother also. The daughters gave her water, good clothe, fruit and food.

The two daughters did not forget the cruel, merciless treatment of the step-mother and the father. But they did not misbehave with their parents; they treated heartily and equally and lavishly. Banishment & rejection by the parents had left a deep sense of hatred; but they never exposed it for the time being. But whenever the two daughters had recollected the past events, the notorious step-mother resiled from the topic and the effeminate father posed to be deaf & dump. What greatly added to the mental shock of the two daughters was the absence of any expression of repentance from the side of the parents.

Then the two sisters, in presence of the parents, talked to one another; Sonai asked : What awaits a

traitor? What is the fate of a deceiver? Rupai replied : Divine punishment comes unexpectedly & certainly. Surprisingly & suddenly the step-mother collapsed then & there. The father left the palace to lead a forlorn life in the lonely crowd of his village.

14. Kojagari Lakshmi Puja's ritual-tale

There was an adventurous, considerate & enterprising king. The subjects were happy in his kingdom. He used to protect the innocent citizens and punish the criminals. The spacious royal palace had guards & servants, queen and prince; it had temple, guest house, rest house, etc.

The capital was the hub of communication; trade & transport flourished in the capital. There were a few well-stocked shops; purchasers & salesmen used to throng to the weekly market. Bargaining, haggling, conversation would create a reverberation. The distinctive sound from a blacksmith's forge would recall the vanishing days.

One day the king's guard through drum-beating made an important announcement : If any merchant's rare merchandise is left unsold, the king would be kind enough to purchase it.

The royal proclamation became a topic of discussion among the merchants. One day one Karmakar (= blacksmith) prepared a statuette of iron; it looked liked a girl. The blacksmith called it Alakshmi. Nobody was ready to waste money by purchasing an ugly statuette. It reached the ear of the king. The king purchased it and kept it in his temple.

Preservation of the statuette of Alakshami (= goddess of poverty) in the temple generated reaction in the minds of the benevolent deities. The next day in the evening the king, after bathing, went inside the temple for meditation & worship. The surrounding of the temple was dusky and lonely, favourable for meditation. But the

king could not concentrate his mind. He heard an uncanny sound. The pious king saw a very beautiful girl inside the temple. The king asked : Who are you ? Why are you weeping ?

The girl replied : I am Rajlakshmi (= goddess of kingdom); I am weeping, because you have given shelter to Alakshmi; Rajlakshmi and Alkashmi cannot stay together. Before leaving, I like to give a boon. It will enable you to understand the dialects of animals, birds & insects; but do not disclose it. The king sat with folded hands & closed eyes. Rajlakshmi gave the boon and left the temple at midnight.

The next evening was another fateful time. As usual the king went inside the temple. He saw another very beautiful girl in a sarrowful mood. The king asked : Who are you? Why you are so sad? The girl replied: I am Bhagyalakshmi (=goddess of fortune); you have given shelter to Alakshmi; I can not stay with her in the same temple. At midnight Bhagyalakshmi with tearful eyes left the temple.

The third evening was another bad time. The king was mentally worried. He went to the temple and saw another beautiful girl beating her forehead. The king asked : Who are you ? What makes you to beat your forehead sorrowfully? The girl answered : I am Yasolakshmi (=goddess of fame). You are responsible for our departure. You have accommodated Alakshmi here. We cannot live with the notorious goddess. At midnight Yasolakshmi left the temple.

The fourth evening was a very crucial time. The king with a serious tension entered the temple. There he saw a handsome man and a graceful woman making preparation for exit. The king politely asked : Who are you ? Why are you getting ready to leave this neat & clean temple?

The graceful woman said : I am Kulalakshmi (= family goddess); you have accommodated one indolent deity

here. How can we adjust with such a harmful goddess? So saying, Kulalakshmi dolefully left the temple.

At the moment of Dharma-raj's departure, the king intercepted; politely putting obstruction on the passage, the king said : I have kept my word in purchasing the statuette. I had no idea about the inner significance of it. I did not break my promise.

Dharma-raj remarked : Long ago *Raja* Dasarath gave a blank cheque to Kaikeyi; his place was reduced to a hell of clique & conspiracy. A king should never make such unconditional promise of cheap popularity. You should not equate it to my rule of justice.

The king said : I am in distress; kindly help me. Dharma-raj said : You will have to suffer. I shall comply with your request. I shall stay here. I shall not leave you in distress. But I proclaim the rule of administration.

The hasty proclamation cast a gloom, and a dark shadow on the spirit of the king. It dampened all pleasure. Pauparisation went on. The royal family became poorer & poorer. The king became unmindful in his duty. Lunch, dinner, supper & pleasant rest used to await him at home. The queen's sharp eye saw that the king's face had become very serious and his mind moanful. Almost daily a few ants, in expectation of orts & leavings, used to gather around his dish. On a holiday about three months after the departure of deities, the king directed the queen not to add clarified butter to his rice & curry. The next day, clarified butter was not served.

The ants were listening to the conversation. Shortly after that, one intelligent ant made a passing remark : See the consequences of our king's wrong decision; by purchasing a statuette of Alakshmi, our dear king's condition is deteriorating. He can not even afford to eat clarified butter. The ants were swarming & talking to each other.

The king gave one pensive look and smiled. The queen sat down next to the king; she observed it and asked the king to explain the cause of his smile. The king was

afflicted; and kept back his remorse by pretending to be mentally disturbed. Getting an evasive reply, the queen insisted on knowing the significance of the mysterious smile. The king tried to divert her attention and lighten the matter as a trifling issue, a silly outburst of his distress. But the queen became petulant and showed childish impatience to know the mystery. Then the king said : I am forbidden to disclose the cause of my smile. The consequence of disclosure will be very fatal. Still her eagerness did not subside. The king silently led her to bed and tried to desist her : Listen, my dear lady, if I disclose it, I shall die; will it be good for you?

The queen said : I do not believe it. I am not afraid! You are to disclose it. It is something mysterious. I must know it.

The king said : If you are ready to take the risk, be patient; wait and sleep to-night. Tomorrow in the morning we shall have a bath in the holy river Ganga and then disclose it in time. They got almost no sleep.

The next day in the morning they went to the river and the king bathed and then asked her : Now, I am ready to disclose. You are to choose either of the two options : My life or the secret mystery. You cannot have both. The queen preferred the mystery.

The king sighed and gave a pensive look again & a faint smile. Meanwhile, the king's attention was drawn to a conversation between two animals; a sheaf of green & fresh grass was floating down the mid-stream of the river. The she-goat asked the male-goat to collect it for her. The male-goat threateningly replied : Do you think that I am as fool as the king to risk my life to please a wife? The she-goat silently submitted to the logic & the stick. As the king listened to the conversation, he realised that he had scarcely been aware of his kingly position during the last few months. His soft & sweet words failed to dissuade her. The king in him stood up. A stern thought suddenly flashed through his mind. His fury turned against her.

The king snatched his own hand out of the queen's .with a sharp movement. For the first time, the queen felt herself being thrust aside by her husband. In a commanding voice the king said : You should know that I do not want to disclose it for public interest. Go away, go away! You have crossed your limit.

The queen was choking with tears! Her knees trembled. She fell flat and sat watching the bold king sweepingly going back alone. She was quite unprepared for the sudden change of mood of the king. A lack of sense of limit abruptly reduced her to a forlorn woman without hearth & home. Nobody would offer her shelter. Where to go, when there was a tiger on the land, & a crocodile in the water? Forest was the only resort. She stumblingly distanced herself from the capital and reached a deep forest. Exhausted, distressed & tired, she sat in the shade of a big banyan tree. The journey was hazardous, because of an absence of road, and presence of leeches, snakes, shrubs and thorns. She followed the Ganga. She tramped through the forest of lower Bengal. She wandered on to the coastline of the Bay of Bengal. There she saw animals, birds, fishermen; nature was closed at hand; but life was hard. Hunger dogged her steps. At night she would climb a tree for rest, safety & security; she lived there incognito. In farming & fishing hamlets, she earned her food by working with the people. The homeless waif was forced to earn her own living working in the peasant families in Sundarban and thus attained a little of maturity. She was in turn a cook, a water-fetcher, a dishwasher, a wood-cutter, a nurse, etc.; she carried water & wood; she washed utensils; she swept courtyard; she scrubbed floors. Some shrew women used to pun & spoof her. She happened to see an *asram* (= hermitage). One aged saint established it; the saint used to teach the local people through the tales of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. The villagers used to serve him food & clothe, etc. The

saint offered her shelter. One day she found an assemblage of the local women & girls in the hermitage. Making all arrangements, they started worshipping the Lakshmi Devi. It was the full-moon night of *Aswin* (September-October). The frail, fugitive woman asked : What are you doing?

They replied : We are worshipping Lakshmi Devi.

She again asked : What will you get by worshipping Lakshmi Devi?

They replied : Lakshmi Devi will fulfil our desires. You may worship the Devi and get her boon.

She said : I have nothing to offer, no new dress ! How can I worship? I have no money for *dakshina*!

The ladies assured her. One woman gave a clothe; another woman gave another piece of clothe. She bathed and put on new clothe, and earnestly worshipped the *Devi*.

The king's life jogged on slowly & heavily. The king was gloomy. He was helpless. Now miracle happened. By the grace of Lakshmi Devi, the iron image of Alakshmi in the king's temple at the distant capital slowly & slowly melted away. The change attracted the attention of the king. But he found no explanation, and he asked Dharma-raj to explain the cause. Dharma-raj explained : The sooner the idol of Alaxshmi is vanished, the better. The forlorn queen has recently earned the boon of Lakshmi Devi some where in her wandering.

The king grew grey with age & tension. Now he started feeling better and he was regaining his spirit. The king sent his police and spies in search of the queen. After a search, they found her in the hermitage in a cheerful mood. Then the king personally went there and brought her back. The reunion made them happy again and they started worshipping **Kojagari Lakshmi Devi**. The king revoked the proclamation and the queen refrained from the inquiry.

15. Kshetra Devi's ritual-tale

There was once a poor Brahman in a certain village. The Brahman had his wife and an only son named Bishnupada. The Brahman fell ill and died. The premature death of the husband, led the wife to the ocean of sorrows & sufferings.

One day the widow had felt her poverty so much that she was about to commit suicide. But considering the future of the child, she made an alternative settlement. The widow had a poor brother living in another village. The brother had his wife. The widow with her son went to her brother's house for food & shelter. For a handful of rice, the widow had to do all domestic chores. There was an expression of distemper on the face of all. The poor brother was in a great dilemma; his wife was poisoning his ears secretly. One day, the cold war reached its climax. After the wigging, the brother showed the sister the door.

This melancholy rebuff drove the widow & her son to the open road. With a heavy heart and tearful eyes, the widow travelled and travelled. Fatigued and hungry, the mother & the son drank water from ponds & streams and hobbled and sat in the shade of a banyan tree. Soon the son fell asleep at his mother's lap.

After a while, one benevolent goddess named **Kshetra Devi**, took the form of an old woman; the old woman with a walking-stick in her right hand, walked limpingly and came near the widow and asked : What ails you ? Where are you going? The widow fell at the feet of the old woman and narrated her tragic history. The old woman consoled her, blessed her and offered her a handful of fried rice from her knapsack. The old woman offered some useful seeds of paddy also and directed her to clear a patch of free *khash* land and to sow those seeds. The old woman stayed there for hours and requested the woodcutters to donate bamboo, cane, thatching grass, etc. and build a small cottage then and

there. Affectionate, calm, placid, motherly, the old woman exercised a fascinating influence upon all the donors and the builders of the hut. Some of them cleared the adjacent bushes and sowed the seeds. The old woman was the last to depart. Making the minimum essential arrangements, she advised the widow to worship **Kshetra Devi** with such cheap ordinary things as leaf, grass, flower, water and wild roots & fruits.

The widow started worshipping the deity right from the next day morning. A stream was purling by the side of the hut. She used to fetch water from it and offer cool water to the villagers & travellers; through this service she gained the sympathy of the people; the villagers voluntarily offered her roots, fruits, vegetables. The seeds sowed that day rapidly sprouted and grew into plants.

Every eye in the locality was eagerly directed to catch a glimpse of the hut and the inmates. The hut seemed to be an abode of peace, a new hermitage. The widow's history became the common topic of discussion. The villagers stood by her side. She was no longer left alone.

Year after year went by. By the time, Bishnupada grew into an adult boy. He was active, energetic, hardworking and honest. Every day he used to get job. While his mother had been worshipping the deity with dedication, Bishnupada was working in the field as daily labourer with devotion. Their financial condition improved rapidly, and their name & fame spread widely.

In that district there lived a rich landlord family. The landlord had his wife and a daughter. The landlord was a practical man of affairs; he was in search of a bridegroom; he preferred an honest & laborious poor boy; he rejected the proposals from lordly families. He had no fascination for the spoilt child of rich parents. His choice fell on Bishnupada. He sent his proposal to the widow through a middleman. It was beyond her imagination. The middleman described the prosperity of the landlord,

and the beauty of the daughter. The widow sought the blessings of the goddess and the advice of the villagers.

On an auspicious day, the marriage was duly solemnised. The landlord was prudent enough to build a separate & independent house for the new couple. The landlord employed several workers to build a beautiful house, to dig a big pond, to decorate the homestead with garden.

On the other hand, the widow's brother became poorer and poorer. The brother & his cunning wife were starving. One day they heard that the landlord of the district was constructing houses, digging pond; and for the huge work the landlord was calling for labourers. So, the poor brother decided to go there and work there just like common workers & labourers. All the works were being done under the able supervision of Bishnupada. Now, Bishnupada's maternal uncle was working as a labourer. After a few days, Bishnupada had a doubt about the identity of the new labourer. He discussed the matter with his mother. Next day, the mother and the son came together to the spot & observed and talked to him. Being sure of the identity of the new labourer, the mother & the son called him & asked his whereabouts, treated him very kindly and gave him sufficient money for an honourable living.

16. Manasha Devi's ritual-tale

Long ago in Bengal lived a rich merchant named Chand *Sadagar*. The merchant had enough of wit. He was a devout devotee of Siva. The fervid warmth of devotion made him rather intolerant of any other cult. The merchant used to go abroad in connection with export and import of merchandise. The merchant's wife was named Sanaka. The couple had seven sons.

Chand *Sadagar* had money & man-power to venture on voyages in the distant seas adjacent to the countries of south-east Asia. The voyage brought him fortune & fame. Once again the merchant resumed his voyage particularly during the winter season.

On leaving home, Chand *Sadagar* had given

instructions to Sanaka. One such instruction was to worship Siva regularly. Sanaka followed the instruction; but being persuaded by another woman, she added the worship of Manasha Devi, the presiding deity of the snakes.

After a few months, Chand *Sadagar* returned from the voyage in peace and with profit, unhampered by any disease or accident. The members of his family and the relatives & neighbours received him joyously. He brought many items of gifts. It was the time for a rest and for the management of the household affairs.

One day the merchant in a leisurely mood was strolling here & there in the courtyard; the children were playing. The ladies and domestic assistants were engaged in various odd jobs. The atmosphere was quite homely and peaceful. The merchant casually saw in one corner of the big courtyard a small & simple altar. He asked Sanaka about the altar. It was the altar of Manasha Devi. Soon there broke out an altercation between the two devotees over matter concerning which they held opposite views. When the altercation waxed warm, the husband spurned out the altar. No one dared to protest openly; but everyone in secret spoke ill of him.

After a few months, the rainy season came. The rainy season continued for a few months. It was a period of heavy rainfall, thunder, lightning, cyclone & flood. It was a period favourable to the insects, snakes, lizards, frogs, leeches. Manasha Devi was waiting for this season in order to teach the merchant a lesson. Chand *Sadagar*'s anger and abuse tended to the destruction of his family. His life during this time became far from comfortable. He fell ill & remained bed-ridden for a few days. His first six sons had to go out for various errands; and one day in the evening some poisonous snakes bit them. They died. The local *ojhas* were called; they failed to exorcise the venom.

Many endeavours were made to induce Chand *Sadagar* to worship Manasha Devi, but with no avail. He

was asked to give his consent only, and to leave all details to be arranged by Sanaka. He adamantly stuck to the worship of Mahadev Siva only. He incurred the sin of spoiling the worship of Manasha Devi.

During the next winter season, Chand *Sadagar* again set out in his voyage for business. He set out with seven boats (= *sapta dinga*) full of merchandise, and several assistants. The sad memory of the tragedy was vivid, and so the merchant made his way in grim silence. But alas! Suddenly and untimely the sea became violent. A mighty cyclone broke the stillness of the sea. The waves were rolling in and the foam was splashing over the rocks & the beach. The turmoil of the waves wrecked the seven vessels. The veteran crew's keen eyes, though accustomed to darkness & cyclone, strained in vain to catch a glimpse of the doomed vessels. No earthly power could save the vessels which were in such dire peril. The merchant & the crew struggled to save their lives. They were flung ashore. At long last, at dawn a crimson tinge was glowing in the east. They returned home empty-handed.

But Chand *Sadagar* was not the man to abandon hope so long as the least possibility of cherishing it remained. Now his only hope lay in the life of his seventh son, Lakshmindhar. The father arranged the marriage of Lakshmindhar with a charming bride named Behula. The merchant, his crew, his artisans, his carpenters took every precautionary measure to ward off any danger, to check any possible infiltration of any insect. The bridal chamber was made with utmost care. There, however, remained a very narrow escape, thin nest hole, hair-breadth passage. Through that hole, a snake made its way in and bit the groom; Lakshminadhar died of snake bite. It was inconceivable to the family. At his marriage, the villagers had been present.

The family, the villagers & the neighbours plunged in grief. It brought tears to their eyes. It shocked them.

The shamans, the magicians, the snake-charmers were called in immediately. All of them failed. Rushing to the courtyard, the village elders suggested to set on sail the deadbody with a faint hope that an able *ojha* might see and cure the victim. The elders acted with good will, courage and promptitude. Without losing any time, a raft of banana plants was prepared.

It was then that Behula bethought herself that she should accompany the dead husband. It was a very, very hard and risky task. But Behula was ardent, earnest, tenacious, chaste, courageous, adventurous. A great tenderness soon filled the hearts of the elders. With a heavy heart & tearful eyes, with a feeling of horror & faint hope, thousands of people rushed to the river bank to see, to bid farewell, to bless and to encourage Behula. Deeply moved, they all said good-bye to Behula.

Utterly cast down as she was by the tragedy, she argued to herself that she was not responsible. She was absolutely alone in the world, & she spent a long time on the river & on the sea. The green valleys, the luxuriant paddy fields, the human settlements made no appeal to her mind. Life became intolerable. The raft was moving along with the stream of the river. The mournful young bride was weeping in melancholy.

And by a strange decree of fate, Behula came across a woman. The woman was washing clothes in the river. The washerwoman took pity on Behula and wanted to know the cause of her melancholy. The washerwoman stopped the raft for a while and consoled Behula and instructed her to venture for a sojourn in the heaven.

Taking instruction from the washerwoman, Behula made a desperate attempt to approach the gods in heaven. She reached heaven and stood before the gods and began to dance & sing. She proved herself an expert actress. For hours together, she continued to dance & sing. It pleased the gods. The gods told her that she might ask for any boon.

Here, at that moment, Manasha Devi intervened. The *Devi* laid down one condition. Behula's father-in-law should be compelled to worship Manasha Devi. Behula must take care of it. Behula agreed. Then, all the gods blessed Behula and gave the boon of becoming the mother of son. Manasha Devi specified the boons : Lakshmindar would get back to life; Lakshmindar's elder brothers too would be alive again; Chand *Sadagar*'s seven doomed vessels would be buoyed up from the bottom of the sea; all the merchandise would be restored along with the vessels. Behula bowed to the gods in general and to Manasha Devi in particular touching the ground with the eight parts of body.

Behula hopefully turned homeward and reached the earth. On her way back home, she found her husband alive and the vessels floating with machandise and the elder brothers of Lakshmindar guarding the vessels. With a splendid spirit and ranting the air with shouting in honour of Manasha Devi, they all happily returned home. Henceforth, the family became the ardent devotees of the *Devi*. Chand *Sadagar* gratefully agreed to worship the *Devi*.

17. Mangal Chandi Devi's ritual-tale

A few stories illustrative of the greatness of Mangal Chandi Devi are as follows.

1. The story of Kalketu & Phullara

Marici had a son named Kasyapa. Kasyapa had his wife Aditi and several sons; the eldest son was named Indra. Indra had his son Nilambar and daughter-in-law Chhaya. For committing some mistake, Nilambar & Chhaya were cursed and turned into human beings, and came to be known as Kalketu & Phullara.

By profession, Kalketu was a hunter. He earned great reputation by hunting many wild animals & birds. The profession of Kalketu caused a massacre of the wild life. The wild animals and birds became alarmed and anxious;

they rushed to Mangal Chandi Devi for help. The *Devi* took pity on the poor animals & birds. The *Devi's* blessings saved their lives.

Kalketu henceforth found no prey. He became unsuccessful in hunting. His eye-sight became hazy. His target failed. For two days, he could not hunt down even a single animal or bird. On the third day, the hungry hunter caught an iguana. Kalketu and Phullara struggled to roast it. They had been suffering from the pinch of hunger; the moment they sat to devour the nasty insect, suddenly & surprisingly the iguana turned into a beautiful woman. The couple became confused & perplexed. The woman disclosed her identity. She was Chandi Devi. The couple bowed to the *Devi* touching the ground with the eight parts of body. Being pleased with their devotion & dedication, the *Devi* blessed them and favoured them with very valuable gifts, and advised them to give up hunting, and instead, to develop a beautiful habitat in Gujarat.

The couple travelled & travelled and at last reached Gujarat. In Gujarat they laboured hard to clear a wild tract and developed the place into a pleasant habitat. But the builder found no purchaser. Kalketu again prayed to Chandi Devi. Kalketu needed the divine help. The *Devi* was highly impressed by the deeds of the couple. The *Devi* was kind enough to shower a heavy rain on the kingdom of Kalinga-raj. The kingdom was inundated and many subjects migrated to the new habitat of Kalketu.

The Kalinga-raj, on inquiry, came to know about the builder of the new settlement and sent his guards to arrest Kalketu. Kalketu in distress again prayed to the *Devi* for help. The *Devi* secured the release of Kalketu through a dream-revelation to the Kalinga-raj. Since then Kalketu & Phullara became the devout devotees of Mangal Chandi Devi.

2. The story of Dhanapati *Sadagar*

Once upon a time a rich merchant lived in Bengal.

His name was Dhanapati *Sadagar*. He had two wives, named Lahana & Khullana. The merchant's family had an aged old maid servant named Durbala. Durbalawas a widow; she was serving the family for many years; she had no child.

The merchant was content with his hearth & home. He got his devoted & dutiful wives. There was good relation between Lahana & Khullana; they were capable of managing the family-affairs during the absence of the merchant. They were cheerful.

Now Durbala was a woman of mean intellect. She was jealous of the atmosphere of amity & good-will obtaining in the merchant's family. She was like Kaikeyi of the *Ramayana*. Her cunningness matched that of Kaikeyi. Being jealous and desirous of depraving the fidelity of the family, Durbala, though illiterate, was too clever to put a wedge for splitting the solidarity of the family. Her manoeuvre was very slight, almost negligible. Yet it had an influence on the imagination of the young wives. Domestic jars placed together often sound and make noise. The difficulties & temptation which beset the young ladies were capitalised by Durbala.

Alienation between Lahana & Khullana became quite visible. The merchant was, at that time, at distant lands. Lahana engaged Khullana in grazing & pasturing the domestic goats. Khullana lived but little at home; she spent most of her time outside in tending the goats. Her mother died when she was still a child. Her father married again. Lahana took advantage of that situation. Habituated to hardship, Khullana had the mental stamina to face the troubles.

But one day one goat went out of the flock. In the afternoon, while counting the number of the goats, Khullana came to know that one goat was missing. So, her heart was panting with fear. She had her companions there; one of them looked on all sides; another girl climbed a tree; another girl went to the river-bank. But

the goat was out of sight. So, Khullana sat down weeping and beating her forehead with hands. Meanwhile an old woman came there, consoled Khullana and advised to worship Mangal Chandi Devi. Khullana devoutly knelt and prayed for guidance. The girls then & there collected leaves, flowers & water & devoutly worshipped the goddess. By the blessing of the *Devi*, Khullana got back the goat.

The instantaneous result of the worship impressed the girls so much so that henceforth they made a simple hut in the shade of a banyan tree and started worshipping the deity daily. They used to sing and dance in honour of the *Devi*. Thus the drudgery turned into a devotional pleasure. It had its far-reaching impact. It brought about a change in the mind of Lahana. Lahana's heart was now yearning for affection and attachment. Khullana was relieved of the outdoor duty of grazing the goats. Moreover, the merchant safely returned from voyage with a good margin of profit. Not only that, Khullana was going to be the mother of a child. The sweet laughter of Lahana & Khullana again echoed through the house.

Next, having decided to go to SriLanka for business, the merchant called an astrologer to consult an almanac and suggest an auspicious date for setting out. The priest worshipped Mahadev Siva. The merchant was an ardent devote of Siva. However, Khullana in her own way made a very simple arrangement of the worship of Mangal Chandi Devi. Placing small earthen jar as the symbol of the *Devi*, Khullana offered water, twig, flowers, fruits, grass, etc. Being intolerant of any rite, other than that of Siva, the merchant scolded Khullana and spurned out the altar without considering the future result at all.

On the scheduled date, the merchant started for SriLanka with boats, merchandise and assistants. They all reached there safely, but on the basis of a false allegation, he was arrested and imprisoned.

Meanwhile, Khullana gave birth to a son. The son

was named Srimanta. Days, months and years passed away. Srimanta grew from babyhood to childhood, and from childhood to adulthood. The mother and the son used to devoutly worship Mangal Chandi Devi daily. The son heard the stories of his father from the mother. The long absence of the merchant was painful to the family; the family was reduced to poverty.

The boy, being possessed of manly qualities, made efforts for the purpose of maintaining the family. And he took the risk of going to SriLanka. Reaching the destination, he explored the island and rummaged in search of his father and the crew, and at last got the information. He met them in prison. But even during the voyage he did never forget the name of the *Devi*. Every day he used to chant the holy name.

Being pleased with the dedication and dependance of the devotee, the *Devi* got the release of the merchant & his crew through a dream revelation in the mind of the king of SriLanka. Moveover, Srimanta had certain sterling qualities; he was courageous, generous, industrious, tenacious and eloquent. The king of SriLanka was impressed. The king had found in the boy all he had sought for the princess. The king arranged the marriage of his daughter with Srimanta, and favoured the entire group with valuable presents and gifts.

Thus, the greatness of Mangal Chandi Devi was established. The merchant & many others became the sincere devotees of the *Devi*.

18. Niyat Chandi's ritual-tale

In a certain village lived a poor Brahman. The Brahman had his wife and his only daughter. The daughter's name was Kamala. The wife fell ill and died. At that time Kamala was a mere baby. The family was dependent on begging.

Poverty-stricken, shabbily dressed and apparently doomed to failure, the Brahman with the baby in his armpit had to go out daily in the morning for begging

alms. The afternoon was for coming back home, bathing, nursing & feeding the baby and taking rest after the lunch.

Year after year went by. Under the paternal affection, Kamala was growing up. Her mother had died about a decade before; and as she grew up, she had to be preoccupied with domestic chores. Orphanage and poverty forced her to do many odd jobs and to learn a lot. She had no formal education, no degree; but her remarkable common sense and serious mind made her precocious. She used to think about the future of her father : Who would look after him in old age & in illness & in case of any accident? After her marriage, he would be alone, forlorn, disheartened !

Kamala insisted on the remarriage of her father. Repeated requests, appeals and arguments had left an impact upon the mind of the widower. Slowly he admitted the logic of the request. Being convinced, he agreed and contacted a *ghatak* (= match maker). On an auspicious day the marriage was solemnised.

Kamala now seemed to be confident of the future of her father; she was happy to see her father and the step-mother; she had respect for the step-mother. But alas! The father fell under the influence of the step-mother. Kamala had reputation in the village. The step-mother became jealous; she used to offer Kamala adulterated milk and food, and to direct Kamala to do all sorts of drudgery and to blame Kamala for any omission & commission. Kamala had an unhappy childhood.

The Brahman's remarriage obviously opened up a period of cold feud in the family. The step-motherly behaviour shocked Kamala. One day Kamala burst into tears; avoiding direct conflict, Kamala made an appeal to her father thus : Oh father ! kindly purchase for me a she-goat; I like to remain out of the house as long as possible in tending the she-goat. By begging alms & selling kids, I shall maintain myself. I do not like to be an unnecessary burden.

The father purchased a she-goat for Kamala. Grazing the goat almost throughout the whole day became the vocation of Kamala. A timely diversion indeed for avoiding the step-mother. She used to take rest in the shade of a big banyan tree along with other children of the village. For feeding the cattle of others, she used to get her mid-day meal in the field.

One day while Kamala fell asleep; the goat went far away. The goat was not tethered. Upon rising from the sleep, she did not find the goat. Worried about the mischievous reaction of the step-mother, Kamala was anxiously running here & there in search of the goat. Not far away from the grazing ground, there were a few houses of peasants. Kamala went there in search of her goat. There she found a few women worshipping a village goddess. It was dusk. She asked : Whom are you worshipping? Why are you worshipping ? The women replied: We are worshipping a benevolent goddess named **Niyat Chandi**. By the blessing of the goddess, the lost property returns home, the mutilated head gets rejoined, one's desire gets fulfilled. Kamala again asked : Will my missing goat come back? The women confidently replied : Certainly, devoutly pray to the goddess.

Being assured, Kamala turned her steps homeward slowly, awfully, devoutly murmuring the name of Niyat Chandi. She sat in the shade of the same banyan tree and continued to utter the holy name of the goddess. Meanwhile an old woman limpingly came near Kamala and asked : Grandchild! in case of any danger or crisis, pray to the goddess Niyat Chandi. The old woman assured, consoled and vanished.

To the wonder and delight of Kamala, the goat returned leisurely cudding the food. In the evening, Kamala came back home with the goat. But surprisingly, the cold-hearted parents were found indifferent & least worried about the cause of the late arrival of Kamala.

On another tragic occasion, being scolded by the step-mother, Kamala left home with tearful eyes and sat in

the shade of a tree. Kamala fell asleep. Meanwhile, that old woman again limpingly appeared and made a prophecy: Grandchild! day after tomorrow your marriage will be solemnised. To-day your father will unexpectedly get more than sufficient alms for the purpose of your marriage ceremony only. Do not think for the bridegroom. The old woman vanished immediately.

Kamala returned and informed the father. To the step-mother the divine message was a great relief. The parents had a mixed reaction; they whispered and made an arrangement for the ceremony. The invited neighbours & guests were in great doubt & uncertainty. Nobody knew the whereabouts of the bridegroom. Naturally all wild rumours were afoot. Hour after hour went by. It was midnight. The invited guests became restless. How to relish the feast in such a situation of anxiety, uncertainty and tension. The invitees were moderately arrayed in costumes of medieval India. Kamala was absolutely devoted to the deity. Astonishingly, after the midnight, a bridegroom with his retinue appeared. The news that an unknown bridegroom had been coming, caused much jubilation among the invitees, young & old. The doubt & derision soon turned to pleasure & praise. It so happened that in another village one bride's nearest relative died at that time; so the sad death forced the bridegroom to turn to the house of Kamala.

Obviously, the bride, Kamala, was in the highest mental tension. All eyes were cast upon her. She got a scope to worship the deity. The kind-hearted deity forgave and appeared in dream to remind Kamala. Kamala got up and silently stepped in the temple and performed worship very simply. Kamala came back and found the husband in a mood of suspicion. Where did you go ? asked the husband. The narration of Kamala could not satisfy him; he wanted to verify the divine capacity of Niyat Chandi; he said: Tomorrow I shall go to furthest corner of your village on foot, but I like to come back on a boat.

It was a challenge to Kamala. Kamala accepted the challenge and went on murmuring the name of the deity with earnest devotion. The next day the groom & his retinue set out for a pleasant stroll, walking, gossiping, bantering at each other and talking to the villagers. The sky was clear & clean. The people then could not even dream of rain. But to their astonishment, the rain fell heavily and inundated the fields & paths. The groom & his retinue became wet & draggled; they had to hire a boat for coming back. The deity's greatness was thus proved again.

On the fourth day, the bride was scheduled to take leave of her parents for the new home. The groom again planned for an ordeal. To conceal his motive, he put forward the pretext of the possibility of dacoity; Kamala's ornaments might be snatched away by the criminals on the way; so Kamala should be dressed like an ordinary lady and stash the ornaments in packet. Kamala agreed. The new couple started their journey. On the way they had to cross a river. The groom dropped the packet into the river and remarked: I like to see again the capacity of your deity.

Kamala was shocked! What a foolishness on the part of the groom! The agony of Kamala was terrible : How to appear before the new relatives in shabby dress & without any ornament. The first impression would be very poor & pathetic. The fact that the marriage had been quickly & rashly and whimsically solemnised, annoyed the groom's parents. Paradoxically, they were displeased with Kamala. The shabby dress added insult to the injury. For the scarcity of big fish the blame again came upon the new bride. A big *Raghab boal* fish was purchased; but the fish could not be cut to pieces! All wild rumours were in the air. The invitees surmised something evil & ominous; they refused to take food; they left. On humble appeal, they assured to eat after seven days.

The jealous step-mother, the callous father, the

foolish husband, the mobbish new relatives were the lot of Kamala. She had none except the deity. So, she had to pray to god for supererogation, for affording Kamala a store of surplus spiritual merit, for eking out the deficiency of her husband. Kamala had to trust on god, but to keep her powder dry. Kamala went ahead with a sharp knife to cut the *Raghab boal* fish. She easily cut the fish into pieces, and to her great relief, she found the packet of ornaments & costume inside the belly of the big fish. While cutting the fish, she was surrounded by the inquisitive mob. On being asked, Kamala narrated the incident. Now Kamala was in a position to array herself in proper dress & ornaments.

But the huge quantity of food was bound to be putrefied. It was a great loss and harassment to the family. The unthinking relatives were there to blame Kamala. At Kamala's request all the vats full of cooked rice, pulses & curry, were carefully arranged inside the temple; Kamala, locking the door from inside, remained in deep meditation inside the temple for one week. After seven days, the invitees kept their words and came back to take food. In their presence, Kamala confidently opened the door; and all the cooked food & curry were found hot, fresh and pure! The villagers enjoyed the dainty dishes and praised Kamala & Niyat Chandi.

Passing through a number of ordeals, Kamala became confident and popular. But she remained a devout worshipper of the deity. She did not forget the holy name of Niyat Chandi. It was her daily routine, under normal circumstances, to worship the deity first, usually in the forenoon, and then to take some food. Gradually the financial position of the family also improved considerably.

Year after year rolled on. The family had been prosperous & popular. Kamala's father-in-law grew old. He had a desire to earn spiritual merit through some social work. All the members of the family and the neighbours favoured the desire. His proposal to dig a big

pond & donate it was approved. The task of digging the tank was started in the winter; many diggers were engaged. It took more than one month. The tank was large, deep and north-southward long. The tank was scheduled to be duly & ceremonially dedicated to the public; the water-goddess was scheduled to be worshipped. However, the tank remained dry. The donor was worried. At night the donor had a dream : Oh devotee! sacrifice the grandson, that is, the son of Kamala; and the tank will fill with water.

Naturally, the father-in-law was in great dilemma. Sacrifice the grandson, for the merit of the grandfather? The old man could not eat and sleep; his face displayed the expression of anxiety & agony. The auspicious day of dedication was approaching. The old man was weeping alone inside a dark corner of the house. Kamala asked and entreated; at last he told the message of the dream. Kamala's world was the world of crisis & ordeal. She prayed to the god and consented. Her consent electrified.

On the appointed date, thousands of people thronged to see the ghastly scene. An elaborate arrangement was made. The goddess Ganga Devi's worshiping with sixteen items of worship attracted the mob, neighbours, & relatives. The grandson was bathed, anointed, dressed and fed and then sacrificed with a *Ramda* (= broad, curved knife with one cutting edge). A great mass of water suddenly rushed into the tank. A great hue & cry followed. The audience shouted in honour of the goddess and in honour of the boy.

The young boys & girls plunged into the water for swimming & bathing, rollicking. Even the elderly people also bathed. Kamala was sitting in the shade of a tree and observing seriously and silently. She was all along praying to the goddess. The situation was grave, serious, solemn. It was almost afternoon. After the completion of the tragic ceremony, after the completion of bathing of all, Kamala stood up, slowly proceeded to the water. The

audience suspected that Kamala was going to commit suicide. Kamala took unusual time inside the water. The people were in great emotion & suspense; they were keenly observing every moment. After a while, Kamala emerged with her son. The crowd shouted & shouted and greeted the mother & the son. Kamala gave all credit to Niyat Chandi. Now Kamala lived happily ever afterwards.

19. Sani Thakur's ritual-tale

Once a prestige fight between Lakshmi Devi and Sani Thakur led the quarrellers to Sribatsha *Raja* for a judgement. Lakshmi Devi is the wife of Vishnu; Vishnu is the preserver of the world; Lakshmi Devi herself is the presiding deity over wealth and fortune; she is a benevolent goddess; she is respected & worshipped by crores of devotees. On the other hand, Sani Thakur is a malevolent deity; he can make people suffer a lot; he is feared & worshipped by lakhs of people. He can turn green fields into a desert; he can reduce a king into a beggar.

The squabble continued for days together. Many controversies arose over the claim of supremacy. The gods in heaven refused to pronounce a verdict. The quarrellers came down to earth; they approached an honest king named Sribatsha *Raja*. The wise king expressed his inability; but the quarrellers forced him for a verdict. The king was in a great dilemma. He had a passion for clarity and logical thinking. He had received them with due honour and requested them to appear after about one week.

Meanwhile, the king in consultation with ministers and scholars, prepared two beautiful and costly thrones : one of gold, and another of silver. On the appointed date, the litigants appeared. The king received them cordially and offered them the new thrones. It so happened that Lakshmi Devi sat on the throne made of gold; while Sani Thakur sat on the throne made of silver. After the initial exchange of goodwill, the litigants

insisted on the pronouncement of the verdict. The king said : My Lord! You have already done the delicate job; when they sought clarification, the king explained.

Sani Thakur became very angry and cursed the king and strutted away alone. Lakshmi Devi became pleased; the *Devi* sat for a while and consoled the king. But Sani Thakur recklessly caused drought & disease, flood & famine, chaos & confusion. Unable to mitigate the troubles, and unable to tolerate the hue & cry of the subjects, the king, in presence of the ministers & friends, handed over the administrative responsibility to the eldest son. Slowly & steadily the kingdom and the public life became peaceful.

Abdicating the throne, the king & the queen voluntarily went into exile. The queen's name was Chintamani. Chintamani took clothes, ornaments & coins in a wallet. They travelled & travelled without any destination. Unaccustomed to walking on foot, the royal couple had to halt frequently. The subjects became astonished to see the pitiable condition of their dear king. Some of them offered them fruit, milk & dry food; but the king did not stay in their houses for fear of divine curse upon the innocent subjects.

The royal couple used to take rest & sit in the shade of any big tree or near some temple. One day in the evening they came near a purling river. The hope of easily crossing the river was damped by downpours & violent gusts of wind. A mighty thunder struck terror. Even the wild birds were taking their shelter. But the royal couple had no shelter. They expected some shelter on the other side of the river. The king called out loudly with a view to get service. A faint reply came from a boatman. The boatman had a small open vessel; he expressed his inability to carry the couple and the bag at a time; he would be able to carry any two at a time. Thinking pros & cons, the king agreed to embark the bag. In the dusky evening the boatman decamped forever. After a while,

the duskiness, the rain, the thunder & the river vanished. The malevolent god created delusion & hallucination only to rob the valuables.

Divestment was followed by disillusionment. It was broad daylight. The sky was cloudless. The gentle wind was blowing. Divested & disgusted, the king & the queen sat in the shade of a big banyan tree and fell asleep. The next morning they walked a distance and then took rest for a while. Here they came across a fisherman. The poor fisherman, out of respect & sympathy, offered one fish; it was a *shol* fish.

The queen had no utensils, no spices; the king gathered dry leaves & twigs for roasting the fish. After the initial roasting, the queen went to a river to wash and to strip off the skin. The king and the fisherman were engaged in talks. Suddenly, the peeled fish slipped & escaped. The queen screamed. The king and the fisherman rushed to the spot. The fisherman was astonished. The king, in grief, sighed & remarked : The curse of Sani Thakur!

The king & the queen moved on and reached the end of the boundary of his own kingdom. The famous river Godavari was flowing as the natural boundary of the two kingdoms. The river had its beginning in the Traimbakeswar Hill; in the hill there was a small village of woodcutters. The woodcutters built a hut for the couple and offered utensils & tools. The king, too, started going to the forest along with the woodcutters for wood, roots & vegetables. With the free gift of nature, they used to add their labour and sell those things in markets. Thus, the king had to eke out a living. The king assuaged his unhappiness by associating himself with the poor and simple hills people. Besides, the king had fidelity at home. So, the king began to forget about the prosperous mode of early living as king; he began to feel easy about the simple life far away from the capital & busy court. They began to feel about approaching death; the inner conflict

was slowly fading away. They adopted a simple mode of life. They had little need for contact with the court & the capital.

But the malevolent deity machinated to put the poor couple to another serious trouble. One day one merchant was sailing through the river Godavari; the merchant had an export & import business. However, because of the machination of Sani Thakur, the vessel was washed ashore & carceened on the shore. All attempts to draw out the vessel failed. Sani Thakur appeared on the spot in the disguise of an old astrologer. The merchant requested the astrologer to count his fate. The astrologer pretended to have seriously studied his fate and then prescribed : Convince a chaste lady to kindly touch, thrust & press forward the boat; the task would be easy. So saying, the astrologer left the spot. The merchant's rowers successfully convinced many women of the adjacent villages to press forward the boat. But the boat did not tilt & slant. On the basis of the information of ladies, the rowers and the merchant went to request the poor queen. The poor king was in the forest at that time. So, she refused to go; but being entreated by the neighbours also, the queen went & touched the boat. Momentarily, the boat was drawn out. But alas! Being charmed by the beauty and elegance of the queen, the cunning merchant twitched her and embarked on the boat and kidnapped her. The rowers were ordered to drive speedily.

The neighbours returned home with a heavy heart. The tragedy became the topic of common discussion for a long period. On returning home from forest, the poor king found the cottage empty, and came to know the sad news. He was dumbfounded. Somebody offered him dryfood; he munched it and left the cottage for ever and reached the river bank. The vicissitudes, which had begun to assail him, showed signs of affecting his health. The tragedy had almost completely disheartened the poor king. He was sensible of the fact that he owed his downfall

solely to the curse of Sani Thakur. He was no party to the quarrel ! He gave everything he had in the world to live the life of a poor woodcutter, but here also the curse dogged him! He became distressed, distracted, dishevelled, untidy and untrimmed. For about a decade he remained in that condition expecting the return of the merchant and the queen. The villagers used to offer him some fruits and food casually. The cowherds knew him as a mad man. All sorts of strange rumours were current among the graziers.

The enervated husband engaged himself in making bricks. On each brick he used to engrave the name Chintamani. To conceal the imprint, he used to join two bricks together. Thus he piled up pairs of bricks. He was partly compensated by the blessing of Lakshmi Devi : the bricks would be turned into gold.

The merchant, having spent about ten years in business in distant lands, was coming back home along the same river Godavari. During this time, the *Satan* made all staggering proposals to the queen Chintamani; but Chintamani, like Sita, did not swerve from the line of chastity and fidelity. So, she too became dishevelled, rough, shabby and untidy. On the way back home, the greedy merchant stopped for a while where his boat had been carceened. There he noticed the pile of bricks, and at once directed his oars-men to plunder the valuable bricks.

The local cowherds and graziers had already become friendly with their mad grandfather, that is, the forlon husband. The old man called the boys; the boys rushed and resisted; some of them informed the villagers. The villagers informed the local police and came to help the old man. A scuffle and quarrel occurred. The police arrested the merchant and his oars-men, and brought them to the court of the king of that country. The jubilant boys continued to rend the air with shoutings & screamings.

The king permitted the old man to argue in favour of his claim of ownership of the bricks. The old man briefly set two conditions : That man would be the owner of the bricks who could foretell the imprint; & who could open the pair of bricks. Then the king asked the merchant to foretell the imprint. The merchant failed in the first test and the second test too. The king afterwards asked the old man to give his proof. The old man said : The imprint was Chintamani and then he easily opened the pairs after pairs of bricks. The king remanded the merchant to prison along with his oars-men.

In view of the excitement which the case had aroused, now the wise king became inquisitive about the whereabouts of the old man. The old man was standing and narrating the curse of Sani Thakur. All the courtesans were looking at him and hearing his strange history attentively. His every word was clearing up the mystery. The king was horrified to know the consequences of the terrible curse of Sani Thakur.

With the king's permission, the old man rushed to the vessel in search of Chintamani. So many people accompanied the old man. They searched each & every corner of the vessel. At last a sound of moaning was heard from a dark room. The old man rushed there frantically and called out : Chintamani! Chintamani! She opened the door.

The period of curse was over. Ten years of terrible life did havoc. The couple now became the elated guests of the king. The king became delighted at finding them reunited and happy; the king treated them very respectfully; offered them food, dress and other hospitality. Sribatsha *Raja* and Chintamani happily stayed in the royal guest-house for about a week. Sribatsha *Raja* donated all the bricks to the king; while the king gave him elephant, dress, ornament, and food at the time of departure.

20. Sankat-trani Devi's ritual-tale

In a certain country, there was a rich merchant, whose name was Dhanapati *Sadagar*. He had acquired enough of wealth through business. He had his devoted & obedient wife. Though possessed of wife & wealth, and a beautiful garden-house, he had no peace of mind. For, he had no son, no daughter to inherit, to carry on the business & to look after in old age !

As usual, this year also the merchant set out with *sapta-dinga* (= seven boats) full of merchandise and assistants, helpers, oarsmen & rowers. The voyage, started from the local river, leaving behind many villages & fields, continued for day after day. One day in the dusk the merchant's fleet stopped for rest near a river-*ghat*; at that moment the merchant & his men heard the sound of drum-beating, cymbal-beating in pairs, clanging of bells and conch-blowing. It heralded some auspicious, ritual worship. It pleased the merchant. He sent one intelligent assistant to enquire about the worship. The assistant reached the house, stood with folded hands and politely asked : Aunts! what does one gain by worshipping this deity? The ladies replied : The holy name of this deity is **Sankat-trani Devi**, whatever you want, you will get; a sonless will get a son, a poor will become a richman.

Upon getting the preliminary information, the merchant himself landed, reached the house, prostrated himself before the altar and asked the details of the worship, and resolved to worship the deity himself. So, though he had gone a long way, he returned home with his mind highly rejoiced. At home, with a great hope, he devoutly and duly arranged the worship of Sankat-trani Devi. Spending about a fort night at home, he resumed his voyage leaving behind his wife and retinue of maids & guards. By the grace of the deity, in due course the wife gave birth to a pretty baby, girl.

With such a nature, adventurous, courageous,

eloquent, the merchant, after travelling over distant lands & making profitable business there, returned home after twelve years. His joy knew no bound at seeing his pretty and lively daughter of about twelve years of age. With exultation at his heart and careless of the consequences, he had not paused for a moment and he declared that her marriage would be arranged tomorrow. At the sudden & unexpected announcement, the merchant's wife was rather shocked. She went on praying for a mercy of the deity.

Mysteriously, all night busy clouds had been racing over the sky, carrying a deluge of rain with them. The wind was howling and shrieking in fury. The wife exclaimed : A terrible night, by far the worst since we were wed! The merchant's daughter drew aside a curtain and peeped out. But at a very early dawn a faint shriek from the outhouse of the merchant's villa was heard. The merchant came out and saw a youngman shivering helplessly with cold.

The youngman was brought in and offered clothe & food. The merchant asked his whereabouts. The reply was astonishing and hopeful. The boy was the son of a landlord; he set out from home in search of a suitable bride. The news electrified the family. Weary with the terrible night of waiting, but bright with the hope, the merchant's wife appeared with wondering eyes and tenderly treated him with motherly affection. Slowly the boy regained his strength & energy. He became cheerful. Now came the opportune moment. The proposal was made and the daughter was shown. The boy consented gladly and at dusk the nuptials were duly celebrated & solemnised. The villagers were entertained with a feast. The merchant & the young man then achieved their desire.

After two days, the new couple were given a befitting farewell with valuable presents & jewels & ornaments. On the way there were fields, forests, rivers and fear of

dacoity. There were *thugs*, robbers. The young husband persuaded the young wife to find a way out. They skilfully put the ornaments into a bundle and devoutly praying the goddess, dropped the bundle into the river water. A large *Raghal Boal* fish swallowed the bundle.

The relatives & friends and neighbours rushed in on hearing the news of the arrival of the young couple, and they vied with one another in heaping flatteries and praises on the handsome couple. They were surprised to know that the bride had been the daughter of the famous merchant, Dhanapati *Sadagar*. But why the great merchant did not bedeck his dear daughter with ornaments? It was a highly disquieting situation which must be cleared up without delay.

To add insult to injury, the fishermen tried their best, but failed to catch even a single big fish from the landlord's large ponds which had been full of fishes, big & small. It succeeded in accumulating a mass of suspicion about the people's whispering; the husband communicated it to his new wife personally. She entreated her husband to request the fishermen to go to the river-*ghat* where the bundle of ornaments had been dropped. Astonishingly, there the fishermen caught a good number of big fishes, including the large *Raghal Boal* fish. So, the excitement had calmed down. The villagers were jubilant to prepare the feast : fetching water, mincing vegetables, digging a ground for oven, cutting banana leaves, washing rice & pulses, gossiping, laughing & whispering. But alas! even the young men failed to cut the *Raghal Boal* fish into pieces. The villagers were in a disposition to believe on insufficient evidence. The credulous people again whispered & whispered. The new bride came to know it through her husband. Now a sense of duty brought her for the first time face to face with those villagers. She was a young bride of strong religious convictions. Chanting the holy name of the deity, she cut the big *Raghab Boal* fish with one sweep of a

Ramda (a curved one-edged, heavy knife). Discovery of the bundle of ornaments from the belly of the fish was a great relief to the bride, but a wonder to the audience. Here her husband came to explain the circumstances of dropping the bundle.

Nevertheless, the suspicion of the credulous mob reached its climax. The eyes of all were fixed with thrills & whispers, on the display of efficiency by the bride. The mob became feverish with excitement; the chaos & confusion continued. Suspecting the bride to be an evil nymph, all the villagers ran away rather than walked out without eating.

The landlord was utterly ashamed; his wife was beating her forehead. During their short married life, the groom had no cause to complain of the bride's conduct. The new bride was greatly shocked to hear that she had been accused on suspicion of being a nymph. She went on chanting the deity's name. The deity determined to subject the villagers to trouble. That very night, they suffered from various diseases : cold & cough, dyspepsia, fever, pain, vomiting, etc. And every patient dreamed a common dream : the only remedy was to relish the feast. The next morning they all assembled spontaneously. The bride touched the cooked & preserved food, & instantly all the curries & rice became hot & fresh. Being convinced of the greatness of the deity, the villagers joyously ate and determined to worship Sankat-trani Devi.

21. Satera Lakshmi Devi's ritual-tale

A certain part of Bengal was once afflicted by a famine and drought. Many animals & human beings died. Being pinched by hunger, a Brahman started for another kingdom in the east. The Brahman had his wife with him.

A pious and well-to-do peasant offered them shelter free of rent. The peasant had an outhouse. The Brahman was allowed to stay there. At the request of the peasant,

his neighbours used to invite the Brahman to officiate their rites & rituals, worships & sacrifices. The Brahman thus became the priest of the village. The Brahman was not, therefore, dependant on begging.

The Brahman's wife was active and energetic; she had self-respect. She was particularly grateful to the peasant for giving the shelter free of cost. There they got the foothold. Implicitly, the couple had no right to develop a flower-garden and a kitchen garden around the outhouse. So, once she had a foothold & a little of saving, her chief concern was to purchase a small plot of land and to build their own house & garden and temple. The pious lady used to pray to Lakshmi Devi regularly and devoutly.

Being pleased with the devotion of the lady, Lakshmi Devi appeared at one night in dream-revealation and advised the lady to worship Lakshmi Devi for the fulfilment of her desire. It was the 16th of *Bhadra*. The next day was the 17th of *Bhadra*. She told her husband about the dream. They, without delay, immediately started to worship the *Devi*. So, the *Devi* popularly came to be known as **Satera Lakshmi Devi**.

Henceforth, as the days passed on, the priest's income went on increasing. The devotees (यजमान) gave him fruits, fees, donation & food gladly and profusely. The priest used to come back home jubilantly and to hand over the bag to his wife in splendid spirits. Her mind was now vibrating with a new conviction. They soon purchased a plot of land and built a house, a kitchen garden, a flower garden and a temple for the worship of Lakshmi Devi. Not only that, two daughters were born. They were named Ramuna and Yamuna.

The Brahman family reached the height of its prosperity & popularity. It was a time of its self expression. In the few years that remained of her life, the wife faced no problem. At that time, she seemed to be preoccupied with household chores and nursing the daughters. She

took an active part in household management. She was active enough to make the family stand on its own feet.. But alas! She once fell ill and died. It was a terrible blow to the family.

At the suggestion of the friends, relatives & neighbours, the Brahman married again. The well-wishers expected the step-mother to look after the two daughters with love & affection. But she soon fell far short of the expectation. She devoted time & care to the comfort of herself & husband. Her cool-hearted disposition alienated the two daughters. The step-mother's main concern was to get rid off the two daughters. She used to poison the ears of her husband. Not only that, she pretended to be suffering from osteo-arthritis because of the heavy pressure of work. Hiding earthen jar shreds below the quilt of bed, she used to toss over the shreds at night and squirmed her body; it was designed to indicate the symptom of her disease. All through she maintained a show of affection. Suppressing her anger & hatred, she had a command of honeyed words.

The two daughters had to drudge all mean & heavy works; still they were blamed, and they were offered stale food. So, their blood began to boil within them to see the satanic wickedness played under a cloak of motherly tenderness. Dodge and drudge went side by side.

Without ascertaining the fault of the daughters, the Brahman determined to award punishment to the poor girls. He paused a few days in suspense as to in what way he would punish the daughters. One day in the morning, after the first meal of the day, the Brahman directed the daughters to get ready for visit to their mother's sister's house. The daughters had never heard the story of their mother's sister; they had now no doubt left in their minds about the evil intention of their father.

The father took the two daughters with him and started for forest at a long distance. They passed through

villages, farms and fields. They travelled for hours. The daughters became tired, but the father did not listen to their appeal. He turned a deaf ear to all their supplications. At long last, they entered into a deep forest and sat in the shade of a big banyan tree. The journey was long, tedious & wearisome. The two daughters sat and fell asleep.

The father was waiting for that moment. Leaving the two young daughters there, the father immediately & quickly started coming back home. At a little distance from the tree, he purposely tore his umbrella and left the umbrella & reddish spit of betel leaves there to indicate his tragic death at the hand of a wild tiger. It was a crime, a hypocrisy, a breach of trust. Till the public knew nothing. The nasty sabotage went on secretly.

The unfortunate daughters were awakened by the screaming of the wild birds. Darkness had set in; there was no human settlement in the vicinity. The forest was infested with wild animals. Their life was in great danger. They were weeping, beating their forehead, accusing their parents, and sobbing. Faint with fear & fatigue, they, with all devotion & dedication, repeatedly uttered the holy name of Satera Lakshmi Devi as the only saviour. Seeking shelter, they hugged the banyan tree. The *Devi* made a mysterious instruction to the tree; the tree opened a cavity at its huge trunk. The two sisters entered into the cavity. In the following morning, the tree again opened the mouth of the cavity. The two sisters came out and sat in the shade of the benevolent tree.

By the grace of the *Devi*, a prince and a police commissioner's son that day entered the forest for hunting; they came across the two sisters and asked their whereabouts. They consoled and assured protection and honourably took them to the king. The king also offered fatherly blessings. The prince married Ramuna, and the police commissioner's son married Yamuna. From rags to royal palace! The two sisters continued to

be the devout devotees of the *Devi* and convinced their respective mother-in-law to consent to the worship of the deity. The two families enjoyed the blessings of the *Devi*.

Meanwhile, the dramatic vicissitudes of the fate of the Brahman became quite manifest. Every day he became poorer & poorer. The cruel treatment to the daughters enraged the deity. The Brahman and his second wife incurred a sin. The alarmed villagers almost stopped to invite him for officiating a worship. Poverty at home, unpopularity in the locality, profaneness in the temple, disorder in the kitchen, dryness in the garden, ill-health, etc. spoke of a pathetic condition and mental disorder of the Brahman & his wife. The neighbours, looking down at the Brahman with stern eyes of reproach & surprise, tried to avoid him.

The royal family of Ramuna had a network for collecting information. The father-in-law of Yamuna had at his command, a network of watch and ward. At the request of the two sisters, the informants were watching the Brahman closely. From the spies the two sisters got all information about their parents; they now discussed with some anxiety about the wretched condition of their parents, and decided to request the king for favouring the beggars with gifts of cowrie.

At the humble request of the daughter-in-law, the king agreed. The king discussed the matter with his ministers & officers, and fixed an auspicious date, and the police commissioner arranged to announce the news through drum-beating throughout the kingdom.

One day the poor Brahman heard that the king wished to favour the poor beggars with gifts of cowrie. So, he decided to go to the capital to receive the donation. On the scheduled date numerous beggars swarmed even from the distant villages of the kingdom. The royal administration made adequate arrangement for food & rest & comfort of the poor beggars.

The ceremony of donation was to be held at spacious premises of a Lakshmi-Narayan temple. The beggars were made to stand in long queue. One employee prepared a record & register of the beggars. When the king & the queen arrived there, the beggars ranted the air with shouting in honour of the king. The one-day ceremony continued for hours together. Ramuna & Yamuna went there to see if their father was arrived there; they sat in a corner. After a few hours, the two sisters identified their poor father from a little distance. However, they had to check their emotion; they had to observe protocol and royal etiquette; they were not in a position to directly & openly rush & call their father. They talked to the security officer and gave a hint by winking & then left the spot.

Upon coming the turn, the Brahman received the donation and came out of the line. Then the security officers requested the Brahman to wait there for a while. At this, the Brahman became nervous, afraid & suspicious. When the ceremony was over and the beggars left the temple, the shabby Brahman was escorted to the royal palace through the back-door.

The two sisters were eagerly waiting in the palace; they went together to the door to welcome the Brahman. The Brahman became astonished to see the daughters there. The Brahman could not expect & imagine it. The two daughters forgave him and did not directly blame him for his dodgery. With torn clothes, long beards, untrimmed hair, the Brahman had a look of poverty. Soon the royal barber shaved his beards & trimmed his hair. The two daughters gave him washing materials, oil, good clothes, sandal, sweet scent, etc. for a comfortable bathing and then offered dainty dishes.

After the eating, the Brahman was in a happy mood. They sat together for a gossip. Only when he enquired what had happened in the forest, then only the two daughters recounted. The guilty father became ashamed

of his mean treachery and seemed to suffer from an inferiority complex.

The next day, the vulgar step-mother was also called in. Though she had not a grain of common sense, though she had a coarse mind without any degree of morality, the two daughters treated her cordially. They all lived together happily for about a week.

At the time of their departure, they were favoured with many gifts on behalf of the two families. Two palanquins were hired & prepaid for their journey.

22. Santoshi Mata Devi's ritual-tale

Long ago there was a village named Bhadreswar. In Bhadreswar lived a merchant. The merchant had his wife and seven sons. It was a happy family, though not a very prosperous one. He seemed to have devoted himself to his own family which had been increased by additions of seven sons one after another.

Thus the family went on peacefully, until the merchant contracted an internal disease from which he died prematurely. After the merchant's untimely death, the business was not successfully carried on by his sons for a few years. During that period the widow had to labour very hard to maintain the family. After a few years of struggle, the senior sons became experienced enough to run the business profitably. The situation was retrieved.

The seventh son of the family was named Ramu. While his six brothers had been earning, Ramu remained unemployed. He had a hobby which did not bring in bread & butter. He had no source of income. He was dependant on his brothers. Any way Ramu's life at this period was comfortable. The relations among the members of the family were amicable. Ramu was co-operating with his mother in domestic chores.

But a few years later Ramu was destined to live in very different circumstances. Their mother now thought of arranging the marriage of her sons. It was her main

concern. She used to discuss the matter with her relatives, astrologers and match-makers. So, on a wave of familial happiness, the seven marriages were arranged one after another within a period of seven years. At first all went well.

In those medieval days what was supposed to be a life of fraternal amity, was not altogether true. So long as the mother had been in-charge of the kitchen room, all the boys used to get equal treatment. The internal situation slowly & subtly deteriorated with the new arrivals. They had not been on good terms. The aged widow could easily guess the whisperings; but she was in a mess of traditions & sentiments. Her newly won happiness was fated to be brief.

The condition of Ramu and his newly married wife was pathetic. The name of Ramu's wife was Savitri. The couple had to do all odd jobs; but they would not get fair treatment. The mean tricks worked smoothly. Ramu was fated to get stale food even before the arrival of Savitri. Now as an insider, Savitri came to know it; she kept Ramu informed. Savitri did never open her mouth. To such domestic insult, there was one remedy on her part : to inform & alert her husband.

Time passed. Alienation became apparent. Ramu determined and declared that he would have to go away for a time. There was something about his decision which made his mother thoughtful and his wife anxious. Ramu had no fixed destination. He left home alone.

It was a joint family. Some members of the family chuckled evilly. The lot of Savitri became precarious. She had to wash all the utensils, sweep the courtyard, clean the cowshed, fetch water, mince vegetables, etc. Not only that, she was directed to collect firewood from the jungles. At dead of night, Savitri would often awake with a sense of foreboding. Exhausted physically and depressed mentally, Savitri had her head cast down.

It became a routine-bound duty for Savitri to go to

the forest at about mid-day for cutting & collecting firewood. Being worried & tired, Savitri one day sat in the shade of a tree and fell asleep. Savitri was snoring. Meanwhile one benevolent deity appeared in dream. The female deity assured & consoled Savitri and vanished. Being surprised, Savitri stood up. She quickly returned home with a heavy faggot. Her life-pattern continued the old routine.

On another day, after finishing almost all the housework, Savitri, with a rope and a chopper in her hand, went to the forest. Because of gradual deforestation, she had to enter deep into the forest in search of firewood. Loneliness, rustling of leaves, chirping of birds, gleamy light & bowery surroundings constituted an awful supernatural atmosphere. She was feeling very uneasy & unsafe. After a while, the sound of a chorus came from a distance and reached her ears. A faint hope! She eagerly proceeded and found a group of women near a stream and in the shade of an old tree. They had a similar lot. They resorted to the worship of **Santoshi Mata Devi**. Savitri asked : What does one gain by worshipping Santoshi Mata Devi? They replied : Domestic problems and difficulties are solved by the grace of the *Devi*. Savitri got a hearty welcome. She became one of them. It was Friday. Henceforth, she joined them on every Friday for a few weeks for the worship.

By the grace of the Devi Santoshi Mata, the husband of Savitri got a shelter. One kind-hearted *sethji* pitied on Ramu; offered him food & shelter. The *sethji* engaged him in his shop and observed him. Satisfied with his honesty, the *sethji* offered him an opportunity to stand on his own risk & responsibility. By learning the trade secret by trial & error, by the patronage of the *sethji* and by the subtle grace of the *Devi*, Ramu opened his own shop.

At one night Devi Santoshi Mata appeared before Ramu in dream and said that the next day he would get a huge profit, as much as that of one month put together.

But he should keep the shop closed for one month and go back home with money. Ramu was surprised to see the dream coming true; so he followed the advice.

After a long separation from the hearth & home, Ramu turned his steps homeward with a splendid spirit. It was early in the morning; and almost all the members in the family were still in bed; Savitri, awoke at dawn, was cleaning the courtyard with a broom and sprinkling a liquid of fresh cowdung there. In the meantime, Ramu surprisingly & suddenly reached home and modestly shouted : Savitri!

The situation became rosy steadily. During his absence, Savitri was exposed to all sorts of hardships. The situation had gone worse before it went better. The end of her unhappy time was now very near. Now the mystery was clearing fast. Savitri disclosed the story of her devotion to Devi Santoshi Mata to his husband only. Ramu informed his mother & brothers about his own business and sought separation immediately.

Ramu engaged some carpenters, thatchers, wood cutters, labourers, etc. to build a separate house within a week. Savitri was lodged in the well-furnished house set apart for that purpose. One female attendant was appointed to attend to her comfort. Within four weeks making all arrangements for separate hearth & home for Savitri, Ramu left home. Savitri continued to worship Devi Santoshi Mata devoutly and regularly. She resolved to worship the *Mata* at her own home. Savitri & Ramu lived from that time in perfect happiness. Within a year, Savitri became the mother of a son. On his return to business, Ramu used to send money regularly for Savitri.

Now that the hearth & home were separated, Savitri was no longer required to do all odd jobs. The separation brought a great relief. The responsibility of doing those chores fell on the lot of others. A distinct change in their attitude became apparent, from negligence to jealousy. Savitri could sense their characters in an immediate

way. She could even sense their words without actually hearing them. Savitri perceived the slow process of deterioration in their socio-economic conditions.

23. Surya-vrata's ritual-tale

There was, in a kingdom of central Bharat, a city, Avanti by name. In it dwelt a poor Brahman family. The family consisted of four members : the Brahman & his wife & his two daughters, Kunti & Parvati by name. The family had to live from hand to mouth. The Brahman had to go out daily for begging alms. Beggary had a very bad impression upon the family. But the premature death of the wife troubled the Brahman deeply.

The Brahman, as usual, had to go out in the morning for begging. The two daughters used to cook food. The Brahman used to return at noon. Then they had the pleasure of taking food together. The afternoon was left for rest & gossip. That was the routine of the family.

One day in the sunlit morning the two sisters placed a little quantity of grains of rice in the courtyard; they wanted to get the grains sun-dried by exposure to the sun. Kunti went to a neighbour's house; Parvati was left to protect the grains from the depredation of birds. With a long bamboo kept nearby, Parvati sat at a corner. She was basking; she lay and fell asleep. Meanwhile, some birds swooped down and devoured the grains. Upon returning home, Kunti found Parvati asleep and the courtyard empty of grains. Kunti roused & rebuked Parvati. The two sisters tended to beat their foreheads and they were weeping & murmuring.

Meanwhile one benevolent deity, in the disguise of an old, grey-haired Brahman, appeared there and asked : Grand-daughters, what ails you ? Why are you weeping ? The two sisters replied satisfactorily. The old Brahman consoled and sought a few grains. Kunti & Parvati knew that there was nothing inside the house; they tried their best and got only three grains, and offered the grains. The old Brahman returned the grains and advised the

sisters to put one grain in a barn, one in a jar, and another in a pot. Putting the grains, the two sisters came back and listened to the advice of the old Brahman. The old Brahman instructed them to worship **Surya-deva** and asked them to close their eyes. Immediately the old Brahman vanished. To their wonder & delight, this time they found the formerly empty pots now brimming over with grains. That day, they were strolling & pacing up & down the room & the courtyard to give the good news to their father. Happy with the unexpected fortune, the two sisters became the ardent devotees of Surya-deva. They started performing Surya-puja right from that day. Simultaneously, the financial condition of the family went on improving slowly & steadily. Prosperity of the family added to its prestige. The family was content at last.

In the meantime, however, a sensational discovery had been made, quite by accident, of the growth of the princess of Avanti. Because of her monthly sickness, the queen did not enter into the dining room; the young princess was serving; the king was dining. Unaware of the absence of the queen, the king made a light joke with the server, supposing her to be the queen. Being ashamed, the princess reported it to her mother. The queen brought it to the notice of the king. Always busy with the heavy responsibility of administration, the king did not know that the princess had already attained marriageable age. The king promised to arrange the marriage the very next day.

The king's announcement was hasty. The queen became perplexed; the princess became puzzled. Finding a suitable bridegroom all on a sudden within one day was very difficult. How could such a major issue be left to chance & accident?

Kunti casually went inside the spacious palace compound. There were several attendants, maids, gardeners, guards. Kunti had an access into the palace. She came to know the royal family's news. Upon coming

back home, she discussed the matter with Parvati; and the two sisters, thinking about the future of their father in old age, entreated their father to marry again. At last, he agreed.

The next day rousing the father at dawn, the two daughters adorned & arrayed the Brahman decently and sent him to the royal garden. In the morning, the drum-beating heralded the royal proclamation. The Brahman became the first man to touch the drum. The attendants were there to bid him welcome to the palace. As the court etiquette enjoined, he pronounced 'victory to the *Maharaja'* & took his seat. In the dusk, the marriage was solemnised splendidly. Nourished in luxury & attended by maids, the princess now became the bride.

The middle-aged Brahman now became the bridegroom of the royal family. He forthwith gave up begging and priestly job. The windfall, the unexpected money & other advantages, made the Brahman buoyant & cheerful. His wife was attractive, beautiful and charming. To the middle-aged husband, the youthful wife was dearer than his life. In their conjugal love, the presence of Kunti & Parvati seemed to be offensive, an eyesore.

Being ill treated by the parents, they became disgusted with home. Yet, Kunti & Parvati went on performing Surya-Puja and doing domestic duties. Their parents ceased to be god-fearing country-folk; they became epicurean and irrational; they disliked the Surya-Puja. The youthful step-mother deviced a plot against Kunti & Parvati. She placed earthen jar shreds inside the fold of clothes & quilt of her bed. At night she tossed from one side to another over the quilt strewn with dry shreds. The tossing had a pressure upon the shreds; the shreds would break into small pieces. The sound of breaking was interpreted as a bone-disease. And the brittleness of the bones was owing to the evil intention of Kunti & Parvati. In their daily worship, Kunti & Parvati,

it was alleged, used to pray for a disease in the body of their step-mother.

The effeminate husband easily believed the false allegations. There must be some other reason & machination. But the eccentric & irreligious man did not verify. He proposed to take the two daughters to their mother's sister's house for a visit, and told them to remain ready in the next day morning. The two sisters whispered among themselves in derision of their parent's intention, but could not say anything. They became restless & speechless. The two daughters, particularly Kunti, knew that their father's design was to throw them in exile, but they had no alternative but to obey. This part of their girlhood was pathetic. Their mother died when they were still children; they did not know & see the mother's sister.

The next morning, the father, in the pretext of visiting his former wife's sister's house, left home with the daughters. They were going along the path through rice fields; some cows were grazing and their bells were clanking. The father was purposely maintaining a distance to avoid discussion. After a few hours of journey, they were walking through jungle. They were in the midst of the thickest part of the forest, where there had been a very big banyan tree. The two daughters, being worried & fatigued, sat in the shade of the tree and fell asleep soon. With a show of affection, he massaged their heads to lull them to sleep. The father had been waiting for that moment; he seized the opportunity; leaving the two daughters there, he quickly turned his steps homeward. He tore his umbrella & some clothes to indicate that he had been devoured by a wild beast. The false & deceptive evidence was left to provide a ground for inferring that their father had been a tragic victim. Such men often make falsehood look like truth.

After some time, the two sisters awoke and found themselves left alone in exile. A thrill of fear ran through

them. The shades of evening were gathering fast around them. By & large it began to grow dark. They thought of hastening back to human settlements; but it had grown so dark already that they dared not make any attempt to find their way back. So they devoutly went on chanting the holy name of Surya-deva.

To their wonder & delight, clothed, in the garb of an old, grey-haired begging monk, the benevolent Surya-deva appeared and asked them : Grand-daughters! why are you crying? What ails you? They bowed to him touching the ground with the eight parts of body & answered and said : 'Save our lives.' Upon getting the reply, the monk consoled them, and helped them in climbing up to the trunk & cavity of the banyan tree. For the whole night the monk remained sitting below in the shade of the tree to guard the orphans. In the next morning he set out to seek the assistance of the woodcutters and gatherers. The woodcutters & gatherers materially & physically contributed to build a small hut and to dig a very small pond, and they offered a portion of their dry food. The next day they brought from their homes some old, second-hand utensils, jars, knife, clothes, grains, etc. Slowly and slowly, the hut seemed to be a hermitage. The woodcutters used to take rest & gossip there daily; they had the virtues of common sense, self-reliance and fellow-feeling.

Day after day rolled by. Putting on the rusty brown garment, the monk used to protect the orphans and advise the woodcutters. Thus the hermitage became popular & famous. One day two friends : a prince and a police commissioner's son, came to that forest for hunting. Being tired and thirsty, they came to the hermitage for rest & drinking water. On seeing the two sisters, they were charmed; they proposed to marry them. In presence of the woodcutters, the monk solemnised the marriage. The prince married Parvati; the police commissioner's son married Kunti. Now the monk blessed them and disappeared.

Kunti was pious, sincere & serious. She had listened to the advice of the aged monk; and she had the tenacity to regularly perform the Surya-Puja. So she lived well and happy.

But Parvati was frivolous, insincere and undutiful. As time went on, she and the royal family became poorer and poorer. The king's horses, elephants & cattle died; drought, cyclone, famine, epidemic did havoc. All those calamities occurred after the marriage of Parvati. The worried king seriously discussed the problems with his council of ministers and identified the cause. The king and the prince unanimously decided to abandon and exile Parvati. Parvati was pregnant at that time. The king ordered his guards : Take her into the jungle and leave her in that hut where she had been earlier.

Parvati began to weep. The considerate guards consoled her and offered some dryfood and daily needs. The guard, left her there in the forest and returned. In the hut she had the opportunity of getting all sorts co-operation & sympathy from the woodcutters. After a few months a son was born to her.

Year after year rolled by. Parvati's son was growing. Like the woodcutter, he was acquiring the virtues of self-reliance & laboriousness. From the mother, he heard the story of her sister. The story of Kunti, heard from Parvati, fascinated the boy. Taking permission from Parvati, the son, along with the woodcutters, went to the village of Kunti. He went to the corner of the village where his aunt lived. There was a very big pond of water in front of the aunt's house. There was a tall tamarind tree near the *ghat* (=landing-stairs). The branches of the tree were like canopy over the *ghat*. The boy climbed up the tree. After a while, the maids came to fetch water with earthen jars for the family of Kunti. The boy asked : Oh maids! whose maids are you ? They answered : We are the maids of Kunti Devi. Being sure, the boy dropped a ring of gold into the jar of a maid. The ring was given by

Parvati as a mark of identity. The audacity of the boy annoyed the maids. They angrily proceeded to bandy words. The boy said : Go & tell your master's wife that her sister's son has done the mischief.

The maids strutingly went back and reported the matter to Kunti Devi. The ring convinced her. But the boy had torn & tattered dress. So the maids took him in through the back door. Kunti Devi had him bathed and anointed, and gave him decent clothes to wear and food to eat. The boy stayed there for a few days. The village barber was called in to cut & dress his hair.

While going back to the hut in the remote jungle, the aunt gave him clothes and food and advised him to take the bundle carefully. But as the boy was passing through the hills, the Sun-god came disguised as a vagabond and stole the bundle. When the boy reached the destination, Parvati asked so many questions and then asked : What did your aunt give for us? The boy said : My aunt gave me a bundle of clothes & food, but on the way a vagabond snatched away the bundle.

Deprived of family-life, Parvati became thin, feeble, sickly & mawkish. At last there came a day when Parvati felt that she should go to Kunti's house for help. Kunti's house became as good as royal house. In such house, the doors were not flung wide open. There were boundary walls, guards, maids, outhouses. Parvati had to suffer the ordeal. Parvati had weary look & shabby dress. Any way, Parvati along with her son started for the house of Kunti and walked up to the tank. The mother & the son sat in the shade of the tamarind tree. A short while after, the maids came to fetch water. Parvati asked them : Oh maids! who is your mistress? They said : Kunti Devi is our mistress. Parvati said: Then tell your mistress that her sister is waiting here. The maids informed Kunti.

Kunti sent back the maids to Parvati. Parvati & her son were taken in by the back door. Kunti received them with warmth of heart and treated them affectionately &

cordially and made all good arrangements for bathing, clothing, food & lodging. Kunti knew her younger sister Parvati right from childhood. Parvati became atheist, lacking in devotion & dedication, devoid of decency & decorum. Her thin body and hungry look were disgusting. Right from childhood, Kunti was intelligent, rational, sincere and serious. Kunti observed the behaviour of Parvati closely. Parvati spoiled her son also.

Kunti rightly diagnosed the cause of Parvati's sufferings. Kunti admonished Parvati and tried to rectify her. Kunti arranged Surya-Puja a number of times, and requested Parvati to observe fasting & penance till the completion of the worship. But Parvati secretly ate something right in the morning on every occasion of the worship. Disgusted with such a wayward sister, Kunti at last became tough and tethered and fastened Parvati only to force her to observe fasting & penance prior to the worship.

Kunti told Parvati that all her sufferings had come through not observing the Surya-Puja. The frickle-minded Parvati at last observed the worship under compulsion. Instantly good fortune started coming. Some positive changes were observed in her manners and etiquette. Her taste for dirty & worn-out clothe and dishevelled hair vanished; she displayed courtly manners ; and falling on her knees, entreated Kunti to explain the cause of her sufferings. Then came references to their paternal home, to the death of her mother, to the poverty of their family, to the blessing of the Sun-god, to the marriage of their father, to the ill treatment by the step-mother, to their exilement, to the reappearance of the Sun-god, to their marriage, to the service rendered by the hills people & woodcutters. After that, the story of Parvati was brought in : her life in the royal luxury, her negligence to worship Surya-deva, the misfortune in the royal family and her exilement. It took a few days to recapitulate the history.

Meanwhile the prince (=Parvati's husband) travelled

on for months and months till he came to the dense forest; there he saw a small thatched hut. He entered it and saw one grey-haired hermit. The prince falling on his knees, entreated the hermit to tell him the cause of his sufferings. The hermit narrated that here the prince had met & married Parvati and that Parvati forgot to worship the Sun-god. So all misfortunes fell upon the royal family, and for that mistake, the prince was dispossessed of all wealth. The hermit offered him water, and winked him to go to the house of Kunti. The prince lodged in the hut for the night.

The next morning the prince, with the hermit's blessings, started and hastened on his journey. The tired prince at last reached the house of Kunti. The prince's friend recognised the prince and gave him a hearty reception. The prince had shabby dress, untrimmed hair & nail, weary and hungry look.

The friend first offered the prince drinking water and fruits, and then called in a barber to cut & dress his hair. While the barber had taken the prince for hairdressing, the host sent confidential news to Kunti alone to arrange the preparation of dainty dishes and to stash Parvati & her son in a separate room. After anointment with oil, the two friends had a good swimming. They bathed, dressed in decent dress and relished dainty dishes. Then came references to their adventures, to their marriage, to the shallowness of Parvati, to the calamities in the kingdom, to the crisis in the royal family and to the exilement of Parvati. The prince suspected that Parvati might have already died. Still the prince had been in search of Parvati. But the friend did not disclose the presence of Parvati in his house; instead, like a real friend, he seriously discussed the cause of the crisis and chaos and extracted promise from the prince to celebrate the Surya-Puja. The next day the prince turned his steps homeward with valuable presents from the friend and an assurance of searching out Parvati by the friend.

Just after a few days, the friend sent the good news of finding out Parvati. The prince sent palanquin & bearers to bring Parvati. Amidst jubilation, Parvati was received back; the king, the queen, the prince and many others went out of the palace to receive Parvati. Determined to worship the sun-god, Parvati, twitched a few *durba* grasses for the worship. But the overenthusiastic prince took it otherwise; he thought, owing to the negligence of the gardener the main gate of the palace remained unclean. The prince hastily ordered to behead the five sons of the gardener. The hasty order marred the joy. A great tragedy indeed!

Somehow Parvati came to know the sad news. She immediately entreated to stop the cremation till her arrival. She sprinkled the holy water and chanted the name of Surya-deva. To the wonder and astonishment of all, the five sons got back their lives. Thus, the greatness of Surya-deva was established and the Surya-Puja became popular. With replenished fortune, the prince and Parvati started their life anew.

24. Surabhi's Path

The sacred cow of the gods had three different names: Kamdhenu, Nandini, Surabhi. The cow had her abode in the heaven. She is the first mother of the cattle. She had the marvellous capacity of giving milk whenever needed by gods and sages.

The sacred cow had a special road running from the sky to the earth; and the cow used to go to and fro all alone. She would only occásionally come down to earth. The Milky-way or the luminuous band of distant stars was the reserved path of the benevolent cow.

The furs of her tail were believed to have some magical value. So, one greedy man made a plot to cut a few furs. One day Surabhi came down and was eating green grass. The cunning fellow lay in ambush; he suddenly came out and with one sweep of his sharp knife cut a good number of fur of the sacred cow and then

swiftly decamped. The angry cow at once went to tread the spot repeatedly and then left for ever. Henceforth, Surabhi stopped coming down to earth, and destroyed the lower portion of the divine path.

25. Features of Snakes

Long, long ago the angry sage, Durvasa Muni, in his habitual anger, cursed the gods; the gods were soon to suffer from infirmity and old age. The gods could, however, redeem themselves from the curse by drinking *Amritam* to be obtained by churning the mythical ocean of milk, Kshira-sagar.

The curse badly affected the gods; they started suffering from premature infirmity. The worried gods sat together and decided to churn the ocean with the help of the demons. The gods came to an understanding with the demons. They jointly churned the ocean. It took a long time and a great effort. After an arduous attempt, at last nectar arose. All were delighted. Many things emerged out of the ocean. The deadly poison also arose. Mahadev was kind enough to swallow the poison and save the earth.

The gods and the demons then journeyed onwards to the shore with the Amrita Kumbha. Suddenly the demons snatched the holy pot of nectar, and decamped. The gods tried very hard, but they could not physically and initially recover the holy pot. Then the gods conspired to recover the pot.

In the struggle some drops of nectar fell there. Now, many animals, birds, insects and snakes rushed there to drink a little of nectar. Many of them did not get even a drop of nectar. There were lots of *Kusa* grass. Out of frustration, the snakes started chewing the sharp and pointed blades of the grass. The snakes had to suffer from the indiscriminate act of chewing : their tongues were cut into two halves. Not only that, the famous python snake vomited its entire stock of poison. So, python is poisonless. But the notorious cobra swallowed a large quantity of poison. So, cobra is extremely poisonous.

26. Sita's curse

Raja Dasaratha was the famous king of the Ikshaku dynasty of Ayodhya. He had three queens, named Kausalya, Kaikeyi and Sumitra. He had four princes, named Rama, Bharata, Lakshman and Satrughna. The names of the daughters-in-law were Sita, Mandavya, Urmila & Srutakirti. *Raja* Janaka was the father of Sita & Urmila.

One day in an adventure made by *Raja* Dasaratha, the second queen Kaikeyi helped & nursed the king Dasaratha. The king then promised to give her two boons. It happened several years ago. A blank cheque!

Time rolled on. The king ruled for several years. He became old enough. He thought of getting rid of the burden of administrative responsibility by choosing Rama the next successor. The counsellors agreed and the decision was made public. The king called to his bedside Rama & Sita and gave words of advice. The priests and the ministers fixed the auspicious date and made elaborate arrangements.

Kaikeyi had her son Bharata and her maid servant Manthara. Manthara was humpbacked and an evil genius; she machinated & excited Kaikeyi. Kaikeyi requested the old king to grant those two boons. The king was not prepared for the appeal. Kaikeyi said : My prayer is that Bharata be crowned king, and Rama be exiled for fourteen years into the forest.

Dasaratha became terribly shocked. He could not utter a word. But the word of an Aryan king could not be broken. The situation became grave and serious. The alarming news spoiled the atmosphere. Rama came to know it; he volunteered to go in exile. The next day the situation was completely changed.

The very next day amid utter grief of a vast crowd, Rama, Lakshmana and Sita left the palace. The members of the royal family and many others stood lamentably.

Rama, Lakshmana and Sita looked back repeatedly; leaving the chariot, the trio trudged. The village paths were narrow and zigzaged. On both sides of those paths the villagers crowded to see Rama, Lakshmana & Sita.

Kaikeyi munched betel leaf and chuckled. Manthara moved and walked limpingly and reported to Kaikeyi. *Raja* Dasaratha fell ill. His condition was deteriorating daily. Within a few days he died of heart-attack. Bharata and Satrughna performed the funeral rites.

But the king's departed soul was longing for *Pinda-dan* from the eldest son. The departed soul went to the deep forest in search of Rama. At that time, Rama & Lakshmana were busy elsewhere in the hills & jungles in collecting wild roots, fruits, leaves and firewood. The soul, on reaching the hut, approached Sita. So Sita instantly and solemnly offered *Pinda* in presence of a *durba* grass, a *tulsi* plant, a banyan tree, one priest and the river Phalgu.

After a few hours, Rama and Lakshmana returned. Sita narrated what had happened meanwhile. The two brothers sat aghast and repeatedly asked about the sad tragedy. Without any doubt about the sincerity of Sita, they innocently sought a proof. Sita had already been in great anxiety. Now she became sentimental. Sita sought deposition and declaration from the grass, the plant, the tree, the priest and the river.

But alas! Most of them maintained diplomatic silence. It annoyed Sita. She could not control her anger. The grass, the plant, the priest and the river whined. Only the banyan tree boldly deposed the testimony. So, Sita cursed the whiners thus :

Durba grass should be trampled under foot;
Tulsi plant should be urinated by dogs;
Phalgu-Nadi should be dry & dirty with dung;
Priest should be poor.
Sita blessed the tree : Banyan tree would be immortal.

27. Draupadi's curse

It was one of the tragic episodes of the *Mahabharata*. Amid a contrasting scene of defeat & victory, of sorrow & joy, of directness & deception, the five brothers and Draupadi left the ancient capital city, Hastinapur. The remote and main cause was the struggle of succession. The immediate & superficial cause was Yudhishthira's defeat in the game of dice. In the deceitful game, the Pandavas lost their kingdom; Duhsashan tried to strip of Draupadi's robes.

The five Pandavas and their wife Draupadi, after a series of humiliation, were forced to leave their ancestral home with their heads cast downward. With nothing in their hands but their weapons, they set out for the forests to spend the twelve years of exile and one year in disguise. A great multitude of the citizens of Indraprashtha wept, tore their hair, beat their foreheads and whined at the time of departure of the Pandavas.

The village paths in the southern slopes of the mighty Himalayas were narrow and zigzaged, up one slope of the hills and down the other. The Pandavas and Draupadi trudged. Some communities of the Himalayas had the tradition of polyandry. So, Draupadi's polyandrous marriage evoked no surprise and sensation to the hills people of the Himalyan region. They offered them food & shelter.

But when they turned their steps southward, the social situation was found different. There the people were not accustomed to polyandry. They looked at the fugitives with a sense of surprise and doubt. They chuckled, nudged and winked. One young couple passed a taunting remark. The Pandavas were in utter distress and malady. The taunt infuriated Draupadi. She could not restrain her wounded sentiment. She cursed the giddy couple : In the next life they should be degenerated into cow and ox to experience the striking battle of courtship.

So, in the rural villages of Bharat it is a common place to see a fleeting cow followed by a few young oxen. A menstruous young cow becomes restless; the cow tends to run. The cow's wild low is instantly echoed by ox's bellow; oxen run wild and run riot, and rush & follow the fleeting cow.

28. A Public curse

Once upon a time there was a creditor, and there were several debtors. The creditor used to lend money on interest. Most of the poor debtors used to return the capital along with interest. The rate of interest was, however, high.

Nevertheless, one debtor was an exception : he was a cunning rogue, a *thug*. It was his policy to borrow in small amount a number of times, and to pay back. Thus, gaining credibility, he would borrow a large amount, and delayed and delayed in paying back. The swindler then would approach another creditor of a separate village. Thus, he deceived several persons in this or that way. So, almost all the villagers were disgusted with his behaviour. They used to curse him & criticise him.

One day the swindler died of hunger & disease. In the next life he was born as a tree. And the affected villagers used to strike the tree with their knife while passing through their path. And the creditor was reborn as a parasitic *Peepal* tree. The parasitic *Peepal* tree had to hug and clasp the notorious tree only to collect and realise the loan lent on interest in the previous life.

29. Marriage of a Mushik-Princess

There was a king of the rats. The king and the queen had several sons and only one daughter. The parents had great affection for the only daughter.

When the princess grew to girlhood, the parents cherished an ambition to arrange the marriage of their daughter with the most powerful young man of the world. For days & months, they went on thinking, deciding and selecting. In their judgement, the Suryadev (=sun) was

the most powerful person. Accordingly, a proposal was duly sent to the sun. The sun was glad to receive the messenger and the message. But the sun declined the offer, and argued that the *Megh-raja* (= the cloud-king) was superior. The *Megh-raja* was capable of covering the rays of the sun. So, the sun directed the messenger to go to the *Megh-raja*.

The messenger went to the *Megh-raja* and spoke eloquently about the beauty of the princess and made a formal proposal. The *Megh-raja* was glad to receive the messenger and the message. But the *Megh-raja* declined the offer and argued that the *Pavan-raja* (= the wind-king) was superior. The *Pavan-raja* was capable of dissipating the cloud. So, the *Megh-raja* suggested the messenger to approach the *Pavan-raja*.

The messenger went to the *Pavan-raja* and tried to convince the *Pavan-raja* and made formal proposal. The *Pavan-raja* was glad to receive the messenger and the message. But the *Pavan-raja* declined the offer and suggested the name of *Deoal-raja* (=wall-king) as a deserving candidate. The *Pavan-raja* argued : my capacity to dissipitate the cloud is a fact, but I fail to swing the *Deoal-raja*. Even when my agents blow violently, the sturdy walls do not shudder. So, it will be wise to approach the *Deoal-raja*.

The messenger now came down and duly approached the *Deoal-raja*. The *Deoal-raja* was glad to receive the messenger and the message. The *Deoal-raja* smilingly declined the good proposal and argued that the rats living below the surface of wall were very powerful creatures. The rats had the capacity to tear down the strong walls. So, the rats were the deserving candidates. It would be better to select one of the rats.

The *Mushik-raja* (= rat-king or king of the rats) was eagerly waiting for the messenger. The travel-stained messenger had a long journey. His arrival created a sensation in the family. But as the words left his lips, a

moment's lull descended. It was a shocking experience. All the children of the *Mushik-raja* fell back in grim silence. After a few days, the *Mushik-raja* directed the messenger to select a bridegroom from the king's own community.

30. A crow & a wood-apple

Once upon a time a jungle crow liked to eat a wood-apple. In search of the fruit, the crow moved here & there, and at last found the tree. The crow said : Oh! wood-apple tree! I like to eat your fruit; kindly give one fruit. The tree said : My fruit is sacred; it is used in religious worship as offering to the deities. Your beak is profane; you eat nasty things; you feed on carcass. Do not commit sacrilege. The crow said : Then how can I eat the fruit? The tree replied : If you are so eager, make a pilgrimage to the Ganga, bathe and thoroughly wash your beak.

Accordingly, the crow set out on a pilgrimage and reached the bank of the holy river. The crow said : Oh! holy river! allow me to bathe in your water and wash my beak, for I want to eat sacred wood-apple.

The river replied : I cannot allow you to desecrate my holy water; my water is used in all religious purposes. However, if you bring an earthen pot, I may allow you to take water.

So, the crow had to fly back and searched out the house of a potter. The crow said : My dear potter! kindly give me a new earthen pot, so that I can take a quantity of the holy water of the Ganga and wash my beak and then eat one sacred wood-apple. The potter said : To dig clayey soil, I require the horn of a buffalo, bring one horn.

So, the crow moved further in search of a buffalo and saw a buffalo. The crow said : Dear buffalo! give me your horn, so that the potter can dig soil and make a pot. I shall take out the sacred water of the river Ganga with the pot and wash my beak and eat one wood-apple.

The buffalo said : I am alive, how can I offer you my horn myself? Anyway, if a tiger kills me, you can get my horn.

Next, the crow flew deep into a forest in search of a tiger and found an old tiger there. The crow said : Sir! kindly kill the buffalo. I am in need of horn. I shall hand over the horn to the potter; the potter will dig soil and make a pot. I shall take out water from the Ganga and wash my beak and then eat wood-apple. The tiger said : I am old enough and weak : I cannot hunt, I feed on grass. Kindly bring a bundle of green grass.

Now, the crow went to a meadow and approached the grass and narrated the chain of events. The grass said : Bring a sickle from a blacksmith and cut me.

Afterwards, the crow went to the house of a blacksmith and called out. When the blacksmith had come out, the crow recounted the episodes.

The blacksmith said : I shall make a sickle for you, but the fire in my kiln is gone. Bring fire from somebody else.

Finally, the crow went to a householder and repeated the whole story. The householder agreed to offer a burning cake of black charcoal.

Taking the hot charcoal cake in his jaws, the crow flew back. But when he was flying, the cake became aflame. Unable to carry, the crow shifted the cake and put inside wings. There, the wings caught fire; then the charcoal cake was placed on the back, the back too started burning. When placed on head, head also got burned; when placed inside the mouth, the mouth also got burned. The crow cried : *ka ka* repeatedly. Thus, the crow collapsed. The crow's desire to eat a wood-apple remained unfulfilled.

31. A crow, a deer & a jackal

In a certain, deep forest there lived a crow and a deer. They were friends. After some years of their friendship, a cunning jackal spied it. The jackal had the evil intention of relishing the flesh of the deer.

One night the jackal advanced towards the deer and said : Sir, how are you ? The deer said : Who are you ? The jackal said : I am a jackal. I have no friend or relative

here. I am half-dead. I crave your friendship. The deer agreed and stayed together for the night. The next morning, they went to meet the crow. The deer introduced the new friend. The crow remained strategically silent.

Day after day passed in friendly discourse. One day the jackal said : Friend! not far away from this forest there is a field full of crops, corns, sugarcane. I have already tested the sugarcane. If you are willing, I may lead you there. Having convinced the deer, the jackal showed the way. Thus, the two friends used to go there for a few nights to feed upon the sugarcane. The crow came to know the new adventure, and himself remained aloof.

The damage thus caused, in course of time, came to the notice of the master of the field; he laid snares and net around the field. That night also the deer and the jackal entered into the field. The jackal identified the net, but did not give warning to the deer; instead, the jackal enticed the deer to feed upon the sugarcane sufficiently. The simple-hearted deer did so and fell asleep inside the field. The notorious jackal passed out and directed his wife to prepare spices in advance. The jackal lay in ambush in the nearby bush.

Very early in the next morning the usual hum of insects and the sweet notes of birds were heard. The deer awoke at dawn and found himself enmashed and the jackal outside. The deer frantically sought the aid of the jackal. The jackal said : Friend! this net is made of sinews. To-day I usually take vegetarian diet; so, I cannot cut it; tomorrow I shall cut it to pieces and release you. With these words, the traitor again lay in ambush.

In the meantime, the crow became very anxious. The deer did not come home in time. The crow flew here and there and at last found the deer in a wretched condition. The crow said : Friend! feign yourself dead and stay quiet till I make a noise, and without a loss of a moment you get up and run away as fast as you can. The farmer will soon come here with a heavy staff in his hand.

Following the advice of the crow, the deer tried his best to feign himself, fill the belly with wind and stiffen the legs. The deer lay down, pretending to be dead. Finding the deer dead, the farmer started collecting & folding up the net. The moment the entanglement was removed, the observant crow gave the indication. The deer ran away fast.

The farmer became astonished and angry. He flung his staff. The staff struck the jackal seriously. The jackal died.

32. The Crow Pheasant

In a certain village lived a fisherman with his wife and son. The family had peace and a little of prosperity.

One day the fisherman and his son went to fish. They caught a large number of *Magur* fish (= a kind of scorpion fish). The father and the son were very pleased; they filled their basket (= *Dula*).

But the father thought a great deal about how to relish the fish all by himself. An evil design came to his mind. He led his son to another hole. He said to his son : My dear son, there are several *Magur* fishes inside this hole also. Your body is slim; you enter into the hole and catch the fishes.

The son, on good faith, stepped in. Without giving the son the slightest chance to return, the fisherman blocked the opening of the hole with a large chunk of mud. The son died then and there out of suffocation.

The greedy fisherman hurried home with a basket full of fish, leaving the son inside the hole of a distant stream. The fisherman, on reaching home, directed his wife to cook the fish very urgently. The fisherman went to the adjacent pond for cleaning and bathing.

While cooking, the mother was thinking about the son; while bathing, the father was thinking of devouring the fish. Soon, the father entered the kitchen room and said to his wife : Let me eat the cooked curry of fish. I am very hungry. The wife offered him seat, water and a dish of rice and fish.

She sat down watching the path along which her son would return. She asked : Why our son is so late ? Why he is not still coming ? The father said : I have sent him to his mother's sister's house with one basket of fish. He is eating fish there!

But the anxious mother could not remain satisfied with the reply. The reply did not touch the right chord in the bosom of the mother. She felt an uncanny pain. She moved to and fro in the courtyard.

By that time, the fisherman devoured the fish and burst out into weeping. Suddenly the husband and the wife rushed stumbling to the spot where the son had been buried. While rushing, they cried and repeatedly uttered : Oh son! oh son! oh son! They unearthed the dead body and brought it home for cremation.

The ruffian admitted what had been done. Hence forth, to express the unbearable grief, they used to beat their chest. The parents could not eat & drink anything. So, they died within a few days. In the next life they became crow pheasant (= *Kuka Pakhi*). Because of that tragedy and repentance, the bird even now weep and often cry out : Oh son! oh son! oh son! Many generations ago, they were Dhritarashtra and Gandhari.

33. A fox & a dove

In a certain forest lived a fox and a dove. They knew each other. The bird was lame and old. The animal had a clandestine desire to relish the meat of the bird.

The fox intentionally made friendship with the dove. The fox had claptrap. The fox once said to the dove : 'Friend! you are old enough and ill; if you do not take rich food, you will die soon. The winter season is not far away. During the severe cold of the month of *Magha*, so many old persons, animals, birds, die; so, be cautious and take nutritious food right from now.'

The dove said : Where shall I get such food? Who will collect it? Who will give me the information? I cannot move!

The fox said : Do not worry. I am here for your assistance. I shall bring information within a few days.

After a few days, the fox came back to report. The fox said : A paddy field lies beyond this forest. The paddy has been ripe enough. You go and eat as much as you can. I shall hide in the nearby bush and look after your safety.

The dove, agreeing to the proposal, flew and swooped down and ate in sufficient quantity. The dove thought of going back happily, but failed because of infirmity and heavy load of food.

The cunning fox was waiting for this moment. The fox came out from the bush and pounced upon the dove only to devour. The dove was not at all ready for the treachery. What a terrible breach of trust! Suddenly, a strategy came to her mind. The dove said : Friend! you know my old age; at this age bones become unbreakable and flesh becomes tasteless. You are also old; you will not be able to digest my insipid flesh. Out of indigestion you will die soon. Give me a chance to regain my health and fecundity. I promise you; I shall let you eat the soft and sweet meat of my young ones.

The dove's proposal suited the fox. The dove was allowed to fly back to the nest. The bird and the animal thus came to an understanding. They retired. It was a great relief for the bird, a rebirth indeed! The liar taught her a lesson. The simple-hearted bird now thought of becoming equally deceitful.

In course of time, the bird regained health and fecundity; now she started to brood. Laying a few eggs, hatching, nursing, feeding, protecting went on one after another. It was another phase of hope and anxiety on the part of the mother.

The fox used to visit frequently and from the bottom of the tree asked about the birth and growth of the young ones. Now, the bird also became tactful and would never disclose the truth. Her reporting was dilatory, behind in

actual progress. Day after day passed in making reciprocal inquiry.

The dove has now become clever to tantalize the treacherous beast. She thought : tantalization was not enough; stern action should be taken against the aggressor. So, she collected all poisonous discharges and put in a packet. Next time, when the fox called out, the dove replied: Yes, my friend, the soft and tasty meat of my young ones is now ready for you. I must keep my promise. I have prepared a lot and put inside a packet. It is ready, you relish.

The fox said : I am happy that you are true to your words. I am opening my mouth with joy. You drop the packet.

The dove cautioned : Friend! do not let it drop on the ground; do not open it. Swallow it immediately.

Agreeing to the caution, the traitor kept his mouth wide open, and swallowed the packet. He could not digest the poisonous discharges. He died.

The foxes are well-known as cunning animals. However, this is the tale of a dove who befooled the fox.

34. A fox in a tiger's cave

In a certain village lived a *Zamindar* family. On the occasion of the marriage of the *Zamindar's* daughter a great feast was arranged. The leavings of food, orts, bones, meat, etc. were put in baskets and thrown in a nearby jungle. In search of food, a fox came there and started devouring the orts. While licking off the dry blood joyfully, one basket got fixed round his neck. It looked like a neck-ring. The fox tried to remove it, but failed.

In the mean time a few hungry dogs came there and chased the fox. The fox ran towards hills and jungles. In that deep forest lived a tiger with his wife and two cubs. At that time, the tiger was not inside the cave; the tiger went out for hunting. The cunning fox devised a plan and said to the tigress : Long ago your husband borrowed from me one basketful of meat, now you take out the basket from my neck and return the loan.

The tigress carefully took out the basket and politely offered the fox a seat for rest. But she could not return the debt. She was not told of such a debt by the tiger. Moreover, during the absence of her husband, she should not take such a decision. Late at night, the tiger came back. The tigress narrated the incident.

The tiger became furious, and chased the fox. The deceitful fox was ready for this event. He ran and ran frantically and strategically slipped through a narrow space between two adjacent trees. The angry tiger, while madly pursuing the fox, had to pass through the narrow space, and got himself entangled. The tiger could not extricate himself and lay like a wedge, and expired.

The notorious fox came back to the cave and said to the tigress : The poor tiger has become bankrupt, destitute and vagabond; he is ashamed to show his face to you; so he has started for a pilgrimage, and he has requested me to look after his family.

The tigress now had no other alternative, but to surrender temporarily to the fraud. The cheat looks after the cubs, and the tigress goes out for hunting. The fox hardly takes the trouble of collecting meat; he enjoys life.

The life in the cave went smoothly for a few years. By that time, the two little cubs have grown up. One night, the two cubs and the fox went together in a hunting operation. They found a swine and hunted it. But the role of the fox in that operation was very negligible. However, they returned with the game.

But the cubs took a chance to secretly express their doubt about the fox, and narrated the incident to their mother. Her sons are adult now and capable of self-defence. So, she too exposed the real character of the cheat. They whispered to take revenge.

One night, while some other foxes in their noctural roaming, started shouting one after another, this fox could not check the temptation; he, too, went out. The

cubs stealthily followed and maintained a safe distance and found the fox shouting in chorus. Being sure of his identity, the cubs lay in ambush and at an opportune moment pounced upon the cheat and killed him.

35. A jackal & a crocodile

In a certain deep river lived a crocodile with his wife and children. On the bank of the river lived a jackal. One night the jackal went out for hunting some domestic animals or birds. The domestic dogs of the village chased the jackal. The jackal fled and jumped into the river and fell on the crocodile.

The crocodile was surprised and angrily asked : Who are you?

The jackal replied : Friend! I am jackal; I live nearby; I teach; people call me *Sial Pandit*. I have come here for a cruise.

The reply softened the crocodile. The crocodile allowed the jackal to enjoy the voyage.

The crocodile said : Friend! you are my neighbour, but I do not know your name and fame! The jackal said : It matters little. Our ways of life are different. So, we did not have the chance to talk to each other.

The crocodile said : I have seven children. I am thinking of sending them to a teacher. As you are a famous teacher and as you live on the bank of this river itself, I think you will be the most suitable teacher.

The jackal said : Do not worry; I shall teach them so that they will be able to count the stars in the heaven, and the sand of the underworld.

The jackal's reply pleased the crocodile. On an auspicious night the crocodile and his wife brought the children and handed over them to the jackal.

The teacher started teaching the art of fishing, hunting, and counting. With the help of the students, seven separate caves were dug for each student. The crocodile make weekly inquiry about the health and education of the children. Day after day passed thus.

Now, the cunning jackal planned to devour the children. Instead of eating them at a time, he thought to kill each child separately and secretly after intervals. In this way, six children were consumed. As usual the crocodile used to halt in the water for an inquiry and the jackal used to deceive by exhibiting the child seven times. The crocodile used to ask : Where are my children? We want to see them. The jackal used to reply : They are busy, reading & writing.

But after sometime the crocodile's wife became very worried. She became suspicious. She sensed some accident. She insisted on physical verification. Being repeatedly requested, the crocodile agreed. And one night, the husband & the wife surreptitiously came ashore and saw the bones of the children. They became very angry and attacked the jackal and rescued the only child.

The jackal escaped unhurt. The jackal, after sometime went out for hunting. This time also the dogs vigorously drove away the cunning jackal. The jackal ran away in fear and plunged into the deep water of the river. The crocodile was waiting for this moment. Immediately the traitor was killed.

36. An elepnant & a jackal & a merchant

An elephant lived in a deep forest. The elephant's body was big, and two trunks long. The forest was full of bushes, vegetables, banana plants and many other trees. One day the elephant consumed those vegetables & banana plants voraciously. The elephant could not go back to its den. The elephant lay asleep on the spot.

The elephant lay on a wild spot; many leaves lay thick upon the spot. Decomposed leaves in a humid soil provided ideal shelter to insects and snakes. Below the layer of the leaves a poisonous snake had its shelter in a hole. The huge body of the elephant had its heavy weight on the leaves. The pressure from above almost closed the outlet of the hole. At night the snake had to come out for food. Being failed to come out, the angry snake

came to bite the elephant. The elephant died. The snake too died because of suffocation and want of food for days together.

After a few days, a jackal came to see the carcass of the elephant. The jackal became tempted to eat the liver of the elephant. The thick skin of the elephant became very dry. So, the jackal had to break ground through the anus. The jackal started relishing the hindmost meat. It took a few days to reach the heart. By that time the anus became dry & closed. Being suffocated, the jackal, too, died inside the carcass.

Days passed. The air became redolent with the fowl smell. One day a woodcutter entered the forest and saw the carcass. The woodcutter used to sell fire-wood in a weekly market. A merchant was a regular customer of the woodcutter. So, there was intimacy between the two. Naturally, the woodcutter talked about the carcass of the elephant.

This communication excited the interest of the merchant. He became inquisitive to see the elephant. They decided to go together the next morning. It was the woodcutter's routine to eat the previous night's stale rice at about 8 a.m. and then to set out. But the merchant, who must have been of a somewhat restless disposition, grew weary of the costly trunks of the elephant. Set out alone at dawn, the energetic merchant, close on forty, had little trouble to find out the carcass. He smelled the strong odour and searched out. He easily guessed the price of the trunks. The temptation of earning a good profit, inflamed his energy. To get the trunks, he pulled, shook, pushed, hauled, raised upward & downward, but failed. As a last attempt, he twitched one trunk with all his energy. The trunk came out; but it thrust into the belly of the merchant. Fatally wounded, the merchant too died on the spot.

After a few hours, the woodcutter reached the spot and found the greedy merchant dead.

37. Three donkeys

There was a peasant at a certain village. The peasant had his wife and children and domestic animals & birds. Among the domestic animals, there was a donkey.

The donkey had been serving the peasant for many years. The donkey carried loads of paddy, rice, firewood, laundry packages, etc. Now, the donkey was old, weak and worn out, unable to carry loads. In the eyes of the peasant, the donkey was useless. Having thus reasoned, the peasant and his son set out from home to sell the donkey in a weekly market.

On the way, the father and the son were engaged in conversation. They recollected the memory of the services rendered by the donkey, the memory of riding on the donkey and the like; they became remorseful. They said unto themselves : To-day is the last chance of riding. The son said : Father! you are old enough, you ride first. So, the father rode on the donkey.

As they had been going along the path through the paddy fields, they came across a group of boys. The boys passed a comment : The shameless father is as dull as the donkey; he himself is riding and while the little boy is walking.

Hearing the comment, the father got down and directed the son to ride. When they had gone a little way further, they came across a group of old men. They too passed a remark : See, see! the boy is an idiot; he is enjoying riding & while the old man is walking all the way and panting.

Hearing the remark, the son got down; now the father and the son and the donkey were heading towards the market. On the way, they met a group of village ladies. They know the peasant. So, they had a frank and free conversation. The ladies suggested : For the whole life you have taken service from the docile and poor donkey. Now when the innocent and helpless animal has been sickly, you are going to sell the old beast! Did you sell

your parents when they had been feeble? You do one thing : You carry the donkey on your shoulders.

Being thus convinced, the father and the son lifted the old animal on their shoulders and proceeded towards the market. On the way they had to cross a river. The villagers had built a narrow bridge of bamboo & wood across the river. Below the bridge a group of fishermen were busy in fishing. They saw the father and the son carrying the donkey and passing through the bridge. They made a damaging remark : See, see! three donkeys! two donkeys are carrying one donkey!

Now, hearing the remark of the fishermen, the donkey became angry. The agitated animal tossed and whisked. The burden of the beast had already impeded them; now the sudden jerking made them very shaky; they lost the balance. They fell down below and died.

38. The monkey equalises the banana

A peasant had a garden of fruit-trees. He used to spend all his days in the orchard, sowing & planting, plucking & pruning, nursing a watering, fencing & guarding. His wife or son used to carry the midday meal to the garden. One day he took his meal in the shade of a tree, and leaning back against the trunk of the tree, he took rest for a while. He fell asleep.

In the garden a bunch of bananas became ripe. The peasant had a mind to cut down the bunch within a few days. The jungle birds were also watching the fruits. That day while the peasant had been asleep, two crows helped each other to steal one ripe banana; they hurried away and flew out, and perched on the branch of a tree in the hills.

The crows had their nest made of leaves & grasses high in a tree-twig. Reaching the safe place, they were about to relish the banana. Having decided to share the banana equally, one cunning crow cut the banana into two pieces. But the two pieces seemed to be a little unequal. The other crow had expected an exactly uniform

division; and so expressed anguish. Thus, the two birds started quarrelling. Their cawing became louder & louder.

A monkey had a residence there in the vicinity. The monkey was friendly with the birds. Hearing the noise, the monkey came round the corner of the nest of the crows. The monkey asked : What is the matter? Why are you quarrelling so loudly?

Both the crows began replying at once and accused each other. One crow said : I took the great risk of stealing the banana; so I deserve a larger share. Another crow said: I kept my vigilant eyes on the peasant from close corner to give signal for stealing; so I had a greater risk of life. So, I deserve a large share. Unable to decide, the crows asked the monkey to decide.

The cunning monkey looked at the ripe banana and posed as an honest judge, and made up his mind to tactfully consume the fruit piece by piece. The monkey assured to make uniform division. The monkey said : The two pieces seem to be unequal. If I were to bite out a bit at this piece, the two pieces will be equal.

The two crows agreed to the proposal. So the monkey purposely took the larger piece and reduced the larger piece into a smaller one. The two pieces again looked unequal. The two birds resented. So, the monkey took the larger piece into his paws and reduced it into a smaller one. The two pieces again looked unequal.

The contenders contradicted. The contradiction gave another chance. The monkey said : Let us try again. Once more, the monkey set his teeth in the big piece and reduced the big piece into a smaller one.

The shrewd monkey paused for a few moments and made a plot of showering some words of compliments. While speaking out those words of compliments in favour of the crows, the monkey took care to hold on the pieces of banana.

Next, the monkey swallowed one whole piece, and said: What is the use of the other piece? You will be

quarrelling for this tiny remnant! I do not want you to suffer from misunderstanding; so, I may be permitted to eat the remnant. With these words, the monkey swallowed the remnant. The monkey said : I have tried to help you : Thank you. Good afternoon! The monkey jumped away gently.

39. A polyglot landlord's wife

In a certain village lived a landlord. He was judicious and pious. Relatives, friends and saints used to receive hospitality in his house. Once one saint gave him a boon of knowing the dialect of animals and birds. But the saint cautioned : You must not disclose the meaning of the dialect; disclosure will be fatal.

The landlord's wife was very beautiful. The landlord used to submit to her demands & desires. The villagers made gossip about the behaviour of the couple. One day while the couple sat together for idle talk, a few dogs quarrelled among themselves in the courtyard. The landlord understood the cause of the quarrel and laughed a little. The lady became curious to know the cause of the laugh.

The landlord set it aside as nothing. But the lady insisted on it again and again. At last, the landlord told the story of the boon and reiterated the condition.

Hearing the story, she became more inquisitive and more adamant. Day after day she went on persisting. The landlord said : The result will be tragic. Do you want me to die? Do you like to be widow? The imprudent lady still went on persisting. The landlord said : Well, invite your relatives, my relatives, our friends and advisors. In presence of all, I shall disclose.

It took a few months on the part of the landlord to settle his assets and liabilities, to make arrangements for succession. At last, an astrologer was invited to fix an auspicious date. The manager of the estate was asked to make arrangement for a feast on that date.

The news became well-known. The aged people

started visiting the house and advising the lady. Their advice, appeal, persuasion and warning became futile. She paid no attention to the moan of her husband.

In the courtyard there were a dog and a cock. The dog became every mournful. Indeed, the dog started weeping and took no food. The cock asked : Friend! what happened? The dog narrated the whole story. The cock replied : Your master is henpecked; such persons deserve this. Being a human being, being a learned man, he does not know how to solve this problem! The dog said : Then, what to do? The cock said : I have got seven wives. I beat them daily. So they remain obedient.

The landlord was listening to the conversation of the dog and the cock. It brought him to his senses and showed the way out. Having given her a good beating he retired. Fired with anger she fled & sought refuge in her father's house.

After an absence of a few days, her parents brought her back. She became repentant and the parents became ashamed. The matter ended happily.

40. The owl-king's Judgement

In a certain part of eastern India, there was a kingdom. The kingdom had a peaceful life. The territory consisted of hills, gorges, rivers, valleys and tropical forest. There were numerous wild animals and birds. The hum of insects and the murmuring of trees were parts of the life. The women had to move up & down the hill to fetch water from the purling brooks about one hundred feet below.

In that kingdom lived a king. The king had a very young, beautiful queen. The palace compound was spacious dotted with gardens, large ponds & orchard. One day, very early in the morning, while a crimson tinge was glowing in the east, the queen was strolling up and down the garden. One owl, perching on a branch of a bowery tree, was observing the queen. They saw each other. The owl habitually hooted and left sportingly.

The queen took it to be a contempt, a teasing, a derision.

The sad-hearted queen retired in a grieving room of the palace. Absence of the queen during the time of breakfast made the king impatient. The king's dotage for the young queen was well-known. She was not found in her chamber and bower. The waitresses were anxiously active to find out the queen. At last she was found sad-faced sitting alone inside the grieving room. She did not yield to the appeals of the waitresses. The king was thunderstruck to know the cause of the queen's sadness. However, the king personally came to pacify the queen with an assurance to punish the naughty owl. The queen came out and ate together. It was a temporary relief to the king.

But the king must keep his word. Something must be done. The king and his ministers discussed the issue and decided to summon the owl-king. Accordingly a messenger was duly sent to the owl-king. The messenger intelligently invited the owl-king. But the experienced owl-king guessed something ominous and politely asked the messenger. The messenger disclosed the matter.

The owl-king had a countless retinue of owls. The owl-king summoned the owls and told them about the call to appear in the royal court. The call caused much commotion and anxiety among the owls. They were terrified. The owl-king tried to bring out a frank & free confession from each owl. Every owl knew the sagacity of the owl-king. So without concealing the fact, that particular owl admitted the fact of hooting before the queen out of childish habit. Then the owl-king directed them to assemble in the evening for appearing in the royal court in a flock. The owl-king advised them to pretend to feel uneasy because of drowsiness and dizziness.

The owls can see at night. So, the whole flock of owls set out in the evening and reached the capital. They repeatedly uttered : Victory to the *Maharaj!* victory to the

Maharaj! Their chorus rented the air of the capital and the palace. The king and the ministers came together to the door to welcome the owl-king gladly, and the royal waiters offered fruits to the guests. An exchange of good wishes followed. Meanwhile the owls started the drama, pretending to feel uneasy because of drowsiness, dizziness. The owl-king diplomatically scolded them. The host king became curious and insisted on knowing the cause of their ill-health. The owl-king replied : My lord! what is the use of knowing the news? kindly tell me the cause of the call! The host king went on insisting to know the news from the guest.

Then the owl-king said : My worthy lord! last night we had a queer topic of discussion. We discussed late into the night. The owls were not unanimous in their opinion. One group argued that the males were in majority, while another group argued that the females were in majority. They bantered at each and scuffled. Then they came to me for judgment. After hearing the arguments & the counter-arguments, I came to the couclusion that the females were in majority. I reasoned that those males showing exclusive fondness to females and also those henpecked husbands were females by instinct & temperament. So, to the number of females must be added the number of females by temperament. Taken together, the females would outnumber the males.

The owl-king then concluded : My lord! we are poor birds! what is the use of knowing our trifling talks. Be kind enough to give your direction, order or message. The king was intelligent enough to understand the meaning of the punnage hidden inside the concocted judgment. So, the king did not disclose the actual intention of the summon, and rather showed due courtesy to bid them farewell.

The king retired and explained the whole episode and tried his best to pacify the rash queen. She could

not sense his gentle gaze. The fool-hardy queen insisted on punishment of the owl. So demanding, the incautious queen again receded to the grieving room. So the king again sent his messenger to the owl king. The witty owl-king had cordially welcomed the messenger and thus came to know the repercussion of the queen.

The owl-king again summoned his entire retinue and narrated the royal reaction. The owls were now afraid of royal vengeance. But their king remained steadfast and directed them to pretend drowsiness in the royal court.

Accordingly, the owl-king, accompained by his retinue, attended the royal court in the following evening and repeatedly shouted the glory of the king. The two kings exchanged their good wishes and enquired about their health. Meanwhile the owls pretended to be very drowsy. The king asked : What happened to you all? Did you not sleep last night also? The owl-king replied : My lord! last night another doubt perplexed the owls. The king became inquisitive to know the puzzle.

Then the owl-king explained that the owls were again divided in their opinion as to the number of mouth and the number of anus. Apparently, every normal human being has one mouth and one anus. So, the number of mouth and the number of anus are equal. Naturally according to one group the numbers are equal; however, according to another group the number of mouth is less, while the number of anus is more. How? Those, who are cheat, deceiver, deceptive, liar, untruthful, unreliable, undependable, have all the normal physical organs. But socially their words carry no value; they are changer of words; they lack integrity of character. Therefore, their mouth is equivalent to anus. My Lord! after due consideration, I am convinced that the number of anus is more than the number of mouth. Physically, the numbers of the two organs are exactly equal, but socially anus out numbers the mouth.

The king understood the implication of the story and bade them farewell.

The queen was observing the scene from a distance sitting behind the screen. The moment the king had entered there, she became furious. She threatened to commit arson, to commit suicide, etc. The king tried to pacify her with love & affection, with wit & wisdom. But in vain. She grumbled and hustled into the grieving room.

The domestic tension was mounting higher and higher. The waitresses, servants, females, and even ministers were busy to pacify the queen. But alas! all failed. Endowed with beauty and youth but deficient in wit & wisdom, the queen became adamant. Soon it became a common topic of discussion, fun and laughter. Some rational subjects found that the idiocy of the queen and the dotage of the king had begun to play havoc in the administration.

Meanwhile the king overheard a conversation between a cock and a hen. The cock said : Oh hen! have you heard the sad news of our royal family? The henpecked king has been daily suffering & yielding to the undue demand of the foolish queen. Had you been adamant on such a childish issue, I would have you a thorough beating ! Fools understand the language of stick.

Hearing the conversation, the king came to his senses. He pardoned her crime again & again. Now, no more toleration. With a stick in hand, the king forced his way inside the grieving room and began to strike her repeatedly. Now she sensed the look of disgust on his face. While she was about to slam and beat her forehead and cry, the servants and the waitresses were eagerly waiting outside and chuckling & squinting. Soon, the wretched creature fell at the feet of the king, and the anger vanished.

41. A terrible python & a tough woodcutter

In Tripura long ago there was a small village at the foot of a mountain, near a deep forest. All the villagers were peasants. Agriculture, animal husbandry, basketry, fishing, gathering, horticulture, etc. were their means of livelihood.

Among the villagers there was a brave & healthy woodcutter. One day he went into the forest with his sharp, curved, long knife (= *dao*) in his hand to hew wood. As he was wandering about in search of dry bamboo & wood, he suddenly felt a gush of wind. The flurry was pulling him towards a deep & dark place. He flounced.

On seeing the woodcutter, a large & long python wanted to make a good meal by swallowing the human body. The python started inhaling wind very forcefully only to swallow the man. The woodcutter was helplessly rushing to the terrible mouth of the snake. A monster indeed!

It was a lonely place. The woodcutter was alone. Horribly frightened, he shrieked at the top of his voice. Because of a considerable distance, his tragic voice was not heard. The sound of his voice echoed from the hills. Had it been heard, the villagers would instantly come running one after another along the mountain paths with their knives & sticks to rescue him.

At that critical moment the episode of Srikrishna smashing a dangerous snake (= *Kaliya daman*) came to his mind. Instantly and steadily he defended himself with his *dao*. He held the sharp blade of the knife towards the mouth of the monster. As he had to rush toward the snake's mouth, the sharp edge of the knife went on cutting the mouth of the snake.

The snake reacted violently, and tried to coil, twist and entangle the man. Fortunately, there was a tree. The infuriated snake coiled the tree. A terrible struggle followed. In the struggle, the snake fell dead and missed the dinner. The brave woodcutter came out alive and a little hurt. He was throbbing and sobbing.

42. The king's judgment

In a certain holm lived a heron and his wife who had built their nest on the branches of a bush. These diurnal birds, adapted to a life in the water, remain alone and active throughout most of the daylight hours, and silently stand on long legs in the water and observe the movement of small fishes only to jab its bill into a fish. So long as they remain outside, they wade alone to catch fish and lead a very peaceful life. The moment they come back home for nesting & resting, they start to banter each other. The husband is henpecked; the wife is shrew. Their nocturnal screaming is a great nuisance to the neighbours.

Disgusted with their quarrel, one neighbour had come forward and protested openly. But the litigants approached the protester to pronounce a judgment on the matter of their quarrel. The litigants accused each other for cheating, double dealing and deception. The protester failed to pronounce a judgment; he suggested to make an appeal to the royal court.

Next day the herons went to the royal court and approached the king. The king, sitting with his councillors and counsellors, allowed the male heron to vindicate.

The male heron said : *Maharaj!* I have come to a realisation that the women are traitors and deceitful. So I demand divorce. In support of my conviction, let me narrate an episode, a tragedy :

In a certain country dwelt a merchant of immense wealth. His wife was beautiful and youthful. The merchant had to go out on voyage annually with his merchandise. Before leaving, he would make all possible provisions for the aged parents, wife & children. On the eve of his departure, he used to say : If by accident, during my absence, my wife dies, please do not cremate, preserve the deadbody till my return.

The merchant had knowledge of navigation. He faced stern realities in the voyage from Bharat to Sumatra &

Java & Borneo, etc. and back. He travelled through those countries, selling the Indian goods and purchasing their goods. He & his crew had to suffer from disease. Once in such a voyage, at length, after several months, he was returning to Bharat, broken in health. Only one day's journey was left for reaching home. The merchant and his crew were eager to come back. They became home-sick.

Meanwhile, the merchant's wife fell ill and died. On reaching, the merchant saw the deadbody. He became half-mad, erratic, indifferent, unsettled, uncertain and vagrant. Taking the corpse on his shoulders, the merchant started wandering without rest & food. Thus, he entered deep into a forest and saw atop a hill a flame of a light. He went ahead, climbed the hill, saw from a little distance a cottage; and on reaching there he found a Brahman family. One Brahman & his wife and a son had been living in peace. At the moment of the arrival of the merchant, the Brahman was outside in search of fruits, roots & vegetables, etc. His wife allowed the merchant to take rest there and offered drinking water. At the time of cooking, the Brahman's wife dragged the child into the fire. It shocked the merchant; he became astonished & suspicious.

After about an hour, the Brahman returned. He was glad to see the guest. The merchant saluted and narrated his whereabouts. Now, the time came for a meal. The merchant was hungry, sad faced and curious. The mother's treatment to the son was so shocking to the merchant that he could not take food. Being insisted by the Brahman, the merchant expressed the cause of his sadness. Hearing the cause, the Brahman laughed. At this, the merchant became more suspicious. He became afraid and apprehended witchcraft & sorcery. More surprising was the discovery that the father had not been at all perturbed to see the deadbody of his son. The Brahman sensed the look of suspicion on the face of the

guest. The Brahman brought the son to life with the *Sanjibani mantra.*

Being astonished, the merchant then & there fell at the feet of the Brahman and made an earnest appeal to animate his dead wife. The kindhearted Brahman brought her to life. It was a miracle! Bright with the light of a great happiness at his wife's animation, the merchant became extremely grateful to the animator. The animator took nothing in return. They took food together.

Next morning the merchant & his wife resumed the travel homeward. It was a long & tedious journey. Though happy, the husband became tired & weary. He took rest in the shade of a big banyan tree; he fell asleep. A river and a path ran in parallel there, and another young merchant was returning home along the river; he saw the youthful lady sitting in the shade of the banyan tree; she sensed his amorous gaze. The second merchant cajoled her. She made favourable response. They eloped. She left behind the husband who had been struggling against serious difficulties for her life.

The first merchant had a faithful dog with him. The faithful dog followed the movements of the paramours and identified the house of the second merchant. The dog returned and led the first merchant to the house of the second merchant.

The second merchant had a barren wife; she became jealous at the arrival of another woman. The two women went to the river. Meanwhile, the first merchant reached there; he made a kink to draw the attention of his wife. She came and whispered : She had been kidnapped. He should pretend to be a beggar and seek shelter only to decamp together at night.

The other woman was anxious to know the identity of the stranger. The clever & inconstant woman replied : He is a beggar; he knows me; he is a resident of my father's village; he has come to see my father-in-law's house out of affection.

The second merchant returned from the local market in the evening. After the supper, the new woman whispered: My first husband has come in the guise of a beggar. He is taking rest in the outhouse. He must be killed at night and thrown away.

This conversation was overheard by the other woman. She secretly informed the beggar. The beggar placed a long piece of a banana plant on the bed and covered it with clothe so as to look like a sleeping man. He stashed himself in a dark corner below the cot with a knife. The alarming communication was of supreme importance. It was a tense moment.

In the darkness of midnight, the two ruffians stealthily advanced and assassinated the supposed beggar, and hastily packed him up and proceeded to throw him into the river. Instantly, the beggar silently came out of the stash and stabbed the second merchant to death.

Within a moment, the notorious woman changed her utterings and caprice. She remarked : You have done the right thing. The ruffian deserves this. Let us quickly go to our own residence.

The faithful dog was with them. The hungry dog was trying to lick the blood stuck on the clothe of the woman. The dog had no other intention. While going back home, the merchant spoke highly about the service of the intelligent & faithful dog. But the notorious lady took it otherwise and determined to assassinate the dog also. She could not satisfy her lasciviousness because of the dog. So, she made a plot against the dog. She said to her henpecked husband : The dog has become mad; the dog can bite us at any moment. It is wise to kill the dog. The idiot husband killed the faithful dog then & there.

The mangled or bloodstained body of the second merchant lay at the outskirts of his house. Right from the dawn, there was a hue & cry, a tension, a cry, a mourning in his house. The members of the family moved

here & there, found the deadbody, searched the beggar and the new woman & cursed them. A few young men rushed, and caught them red-handed, and brought in front of a crowd assembled. They chided and kicked the assassinator and handed over him to the police. The verdict of the court was his lifelong imprisonment.

The lustful lady was not, however, suffering from any agony; she had no prick of conscience. In pretension, she feigned herself and thus got the sympathy of the crowd. She escaped and went back home. But when she had heard the verdict of the court, she made erratic adventure, hunting down another young man to her passion & purpose. One day the profligate woman eloped with the young man. It did not take long time to reach the ear of the husband who had been struggling in the jail shock after shock. But the foolish husband failed to free himself from the blind love and dotage. He was shocked and died in the prison.

The male heron concluded with the remark : *Maharaj* / the women are untrustworthy & deceitful.

The king next permitted the female heron to vindicate her grievances. She had it to say that the males are whimsical and unreliable. In support of her complaint, the complainant recounted a story :

In a certain kingdom there was a great friendship between a king's son and a minister's son. One day the two friends set out for hunting. In search of wild beast, they moved in the deep wilderness, but found no animal. However, they were astonished to see a beautiful castle in the deep forest.

It was a *Mayapuri*, a dream castle. Seven young beautiful damsels used to live there. The damsels had capacity to befool even the wild animals & birds. In the previous life, they were human beings. They were seven sisters. They were very beautiful. One day, with their parents, they went to visit a holy place. But on the way, a group of enemy aliens saw them. The profligate enemy

aliens killed the parents and attempted to rape the daughters. The daughters committed suicide. In the next life, they became *Pari* (= celestial damsels)

Long ago, one day one brother and one sister were going to their maternal uncle's house. The damsels misled them and brought to the castle. It was not the only instance. In erratic adventures, they were to hunt down young men to their passion & purpose. Here in this case the young man, ignorant of the identity of the damsels, became lascivious; so, he became languished soon. He died. Since then the sister had a lonely life in an abnormal atmosphere.

Meanwhile, the king's son and the minister's son were captivated. The prince was very much tired; he was allowed to take rest inside the castle. The young damsels took the minister's son to the forest for amorous sports. The minister's son had a physique of three young men; so, the damsels were very happy with the strong & stout man.

After a long time, the solitary sister got a rare opportunity to talk to a human being, to express her anguish, to disclose the mystery of the castle. The prince was astonished to hear the caprice of the illusive maidens. Out of a chivalrous spirit, he promised to rescue her. But time was very, very short. They must escape. She warned that the fate of the minister's son would be like that of her brother. Not only that, the prince would be the next target and victim. So, it would be wise to escape immediately. Being thus convinced, the prince took her and galloped.

The celestial maidens were informed of the escape. They rushed and chased. Unable to catch the prince, they played a deceptive game instantaneously. They cried out : Prince! the girl is not a human being; she is a witch. Do not believe her. We warn you.

It that fleeting moment, the perplexed prince thought of self-preservation only. It confused the prince. He was

in a dilemma. The girl made an earnest appeal : I beg you not to leave me. I swear I am a human being. Their word is not true. Their warning is deceptive. It is no warning at all. I implore you to be merciful and to grant my prayer.

Her tears were streaming down her cheeks. But the prince fell into a terrible dilemma. The fraud misguided him. He threw and cast her down. The maidens killed her on the spot.

The female heron concluded : *Maharaj!* thus I have come to the conclusion that the heart of males is as hard as stone; they are fickle-minded. They are power-hungry. They are despotic.

Now, the king opened his mouth. The king said : You are generalising and over-simplifying. Indeed, in every caste & community, there are good people & bad people. In the males as well as in the females, there are honest & dishonest persons. It is unwise to blame & curse one entire group and praise another group wholly. Go home & live peacefully, otherwise my jail is there.

43. A happy Princess

There was a princess. She was beautiful and healthy. She grew up. The king desired to arrange her marriage. Many proposals came from different royal dynasties. But the proposals were found unsuitable. At last it was decided that a young man of merits, born of whatsoever parents, might be selected. The young man must stand a test : during the winter season in the month of *Pousha* (December-January) the boy must remain in deep, cold water of the royal tank; he should remain in water from dusk to dawn; drowning his body upto neck; he should keep standing.

In consultation with the council of ministers, and the royal astrologer and the priest, the king fixed the auspicious day of *Pousha sankanti* for holding the test. It was given due publicity. Festive arrangements were made on the auspicious day. Many distinguished guests, and

aspirants were seated in the magnificent hall. Thousands of spectators thronged at the four banks of the big royal tank in front of the palace. It was a hilarious moment of laughing, joking, excitement and adventure. Many valiant princes, and sons of ministers and rich merchants, son of police officers and commissioners had gathered there. They were entertained with rich food & drinks. The king formally announced that his daughter would be given in marriage to him, who would tolerate the severe cold in water for the whole night.

The atmosphere was diffusing fragrance. The sky was clean. The folkdancers were displaying their arts. The folksingers were singing chivalrous songs. The palace was gleaming brightly. The sun was setting; when the time was coming for the test to begin, the princess, clad in costly & dazzling robes with a bewitching charm, entered the hall. The arrival of the paragon of beauty excited the aspirants. The moment the brother of the princess gave the signal, the candidates jumped & plunged into the water. The spectators shouted in joy. Adequate arrangements were made for safety, security and health care of the examinees.

The ordeal began. What made the occasion so amazing was that instead of being a courtship between the princess and a prince under the affectionate eyes of tolerant parents, it was a public test of ability. Indeed, the sensation was so great that the examinees were the focus of all eyes. The examinees were in sportsman-like-spirit, romantic & imaginative. They were animated by a warm delight. But unaccustomed as they were to such hardship and cold, they strained in vain through the shivering cold of a December night. Many noted princes withdrew one after another. At last at midnight there was none in the water. All failed, and uncomfortable in their wet clothes, they were trembling & pouting. The attendants put out their hands to help them off with their dripping dress.

The relishable news spread like a rumour. The pomp & show, and the hollow aristocracy and worthlessness of the princes alienated everybody. Inside the palace also a conflict of opinion began; the consensus of opinion was to wait & see.

There lived a poor peasant family in a distant and wild corner of the kingdom. The peasant suddenly died leaving behind his wife and a little boy. The widow had to face stress & strain to bring up the baby. No magician waved his wand over her head to solve her problems. They had to live from hand to mouth. Thus, the poor baby grew through childhood to boyhood. Right from the childhood, he was accustomed to poverty & hardship; as a boy he became keenly interested in assisting his mother. He was never led along the paths of luxury and crime. His physical strength, his diligence, his generosity were an inspiration to the village boys. Here in the countryside, in the summer the peasantry were bathed in perspiration and in the winter they froze. They lived in mud & water.

An obscure peasant boy could not hope for a mate more eligible in every way. It was daydream to him. But since it was the question of physical fitness, the boy bent a willing ear to the condition set forth by the king. The news of the failure of the princes inflamed the imagination of the peasant boy. Slowly & reluctantly the mother gave her consent.

The boy journeyed forth and reached the capital. The affectionate mother followed. The gate-keeper did not allow the boy to enter. The boy fell at his feet and the poor mother made a fervent appeal. It created a sensation. On the second day the gate-keeper unwillingly agreed to inform the ministers and the king. The court allowed his entry. The shabby boy became an object of neglect and ridicule. The royal court accepted his appeal after long persuasion. Without any pomp and publicity, the trial began in one evening. From dusk to dawn he

stood firm in the cool water. His old mother collected some broken pieces of firewood and slowly & measurably set fire only to warm herself. The next morning in presence of the police guards and a few other watchers, the boy came out cheerfully and successfully. The royal court became surprised.

But there were vested interests. Those, whose sons were found unfit, made difficulties. There again began the conflict of opinion. It was far below the dignity of the royal family. The boy was discouraged and insulted. No body in the court came to his help. Neither the boy nor his illiterate mother dared to approach the king and the princess. Amid a purposely created scene of horrible confusion and furniture-upset, the boy and his mother had to leave the palace quickly in abject despair. The old mother murmured shyly.

The boy was seeking an opportunity of avenging the insult. He, with the mother's permission, set out south eastward and travelled for days and reached the kingdom of the Magh *Raja*. The court of the Magh *Raja* was kind enough to offer him temporary refuge and to listen to his tragic history. The king consoled him, and assured him and directed him to go back home. After a few months the king sent his ambassador to the court of the accused king, with the message that the Magh *Raja's* brilliant minister, Sukhimi, had the desire to pay a visit. The accused king agreed and sent a formal invitation. With a view to offer a fitting hospitality to the guest-minister, the host-king arranged choicest delicacies. But the guest preferred self-cooking and brought his own attendants. The guest's attendants made tripod fireplaces at two banks of the royal tank : the two tripods were distantly apart from one another; on one fireplace rice was placed in a big pot; it was without fire; another hearth was simply ignited, but it was without any pot of curry. The atmosphere was lively and sportive. The matter was soon reported to the host. The host asked the guest : How the

rice and curry will be boiled in two such distinct and different fire places? How fire would give its effect from such a long distance?

Now, the guest brought with him his sharp sense of humour and wit & wisdom. He replied : If cooking is impossible under such arrangement, then how the widow's meagre fire on the bank had kept the boy warm in deep, cool water?

The witty reply produced a laughter, and the host came to his senses. The host frankly and freely narrated the episodes. When the guest assured to arrange the marriage with the peasant boy, the guest winked to stop the mockery of cooking and gave his consent to take food from the host's kitchen itself. All sorts of delicacies were served. They were to eat & eat. Thus, the embassy ended in a comedy.

Within a few months, the king kept his word and splendidly arranged the marriage of the princess with the peasant boy. Thus the boy achieved his heart's desire. Fortune smiled on the mother and the son. At the order of the king, a beautiful garden house was rapidly built in the native village of the boy. In the village, the princess was the loveliest woman. She would seldom go out; but when she had to go out she would move regally, surrounded by a crowd of satelites. She became the focus of all eyes. Her tender eyes, mild temperament, good health, rustling of her dress, and a pleasant fragrance would make a romantic atmosphere.

44. An unfortunate Princess

There was a princess. She was beautiful and meritorious. The king and the queen were affectionate and proud of her. She grew up from childhood to girlhood. The prosperous life went on peacefully. But now the royal family had the responsibility of arranging the marriage of the princess.

It was difficult to find out a suitable match for such a charming and pretty princess. A wide publicity was

given to the neighbouring kingdoms. The chivalrous instincts of many princes were profoundly aroused. Many kings duly sent proposals of marriage with their sons. A good number of princes personally visited the court, but failed to convince the king.

The king then made an alternative arrangement. In every market, drumbeating was made to announce the wish of the king. The scope was kept wide open to all, subject to the condition that an extraodinarily wonderful thing must be furnished by the would-be bridegroom. Birth & station of life were not the considerations.

The announcement awakened four friends from their hesitation. They decided to make an adventure. They came from rich families. Not money, but something else must be furnished. However, with a reasonable amount of money for their own expenses, the four friends left home. They travelled & travelled on foot. Being very tired, they sat in the shade of a big banyan tree. There was a temple and a small rest-house near the tree. The atmosphere of the place was serene. They temporarily made it their common place of haltage. Every day in the morning they used to go out in search of any wonderful thing and in the evening they met together.

One day the first friend travelled a long distance and reached a market. There he found an inquisitive assemblage and a merchant. The merchant brought a unique mirror. With the mirror one would see any contemporary incident. The first friend purchased the mirror.

The second friend moved to another direction and reached a market. There he found a merchant to sell a magic seat with which one could travel a long distance very quickly. The second friend purchased it.

The third friend, in course of his wandering, met a salesman to sell a unique adhesive, with which one could repair and rejoin any broken object or instrument. He purchased it.

The fourth friend was also lucky to get an extra ordinary object with which one could reanimate even a dead person. He purchased it.

The four friends, true to their words, came back with great hope. They took rest and talked to each other about their collection. They were very hopeful. The next day in the early morning they tried to test their things. The first friend held out the mirror and concentrated his attention on the palace. To his astonishment, he saw the deadbody of the princess reflected in the mirror. It was a pathetic scene. He at once showed it to his friends. Something must be done before cremation. They rode on the magic seat of the second friend; but because of the heavy weight of the four passengers, the seat broke down. But the third friend was ready with his adhesive to immediately repair the seat. Thus, they hurried to reach the palace. The palace was a long way away.

It was a bolt from the blue. It came suddenly & unexpectedly. It upset the whole plan. Several physicians were called in. But in vain. The princess died in great agony. The king, the queen, the ministers, the relatives and even the servants were weeping. It was a pathetic scene. There was a great crowd and the police forces were deployed to maintain law & order.

The funeral did not take place, but preparations were going on. In the meantime the four friends reached. They, too, were deeply moved. They were eager to make known their noble mission. They wanted to see the princess at least once! An angry police said : Get out. They replied : We can bring her back to life. The police retorted : You are speaking nonsense! They appealed : Please! give us a chance. The police reluctantly said : Wait. Their appeal, through proper channel, quickly reached the proper ear. The bereaved family immediately gave permission.

The four friends solemnly sat together beside the deadbody. The fourth friend then applied his *Sanjibani Sudha*, and slowly and slowly the princess opened her eyes and smiled.

The situation got changed abruptly. The tragedy turned into a comedy. The palace again became rosy and jubilant. The four friends did the job magnificently and magically. All became very, very pleased with the four friends. They were honourably given hospitality in the royal guest-house for a few days.

When thus things came down to normalcy, the royal court enquired about their whereabouts. They, too, frankly admitted the intention of their adventure. Now the king was caught in a dilemma. The four friends have contributed to save the royal family. But how could one princess be married to four friends? After much deliberations, the court decided that the four friends were lifesavers, and as lifesavers they were to be treated as second fathers. The king profusely rewarded them. The four friends rose from obscure origins to wealth and fame. The royal patrons treated them with utmost magnificence. They became the idols of the moment. In the farewell dinner, they were invited to sit by the side of the king. The queen and the princess served. Their eyes met. The princess gave them a friendly smile. A charming adventure turned into a relation of delicate complexity!

45. Tragedy of a dove bird

In a certain village lived a farmer with his wife and daughter. One day the wife fell ill and died. The daughter's age was about five years at that time; the friends and relatives arranged for the remarriage of the farmer. During the solemnisation of this marriage, one *Kanya-yatri* whispered to one *Var-Yatri* : 'Having planted on *vish-kachu* here to-day, we are leaving.' In course of time, the second wife also became mother of a few children.

The farmer was very busy in the outdoor activities. The step-mother looked after the indoor activities. She brought up the daughter by the first wife. The first daughter was diligent and dutiful, compassionate &

healthy. But the step-mother detested her from the core of her heart. The step-brothers and the step-sisters were jealous. The step-mother had great liking for her own sons and daughters. She used to offer them good meal, and decent clothes, but no work; so they used to get time for playing and singing. They lived in pleasure & pomp. They felt themselves superior to their step-sister.

To the step-daughter, she posed to be sweet-tongued, and equally affectionate. Her talks about the step-daughter had often a subtle edge of taunt. She used even tricks to defame her. Few could catch the irony behind those words!

The first daughter would not get good meal, decent clothes and time for games and rest. She had to eat cold, stale rice of the previous night. Her forlorn condition was made still worse by the neglect of her father. So, she had to live in stern severity. The contrivance of the step-mother steeled the heart of the farmer against the first daughter. The daughter had to perform all domestic chores. She would be held responsible for any mistake or misdeed. She had to suffer for the mistake of others. She used to shed a few tears in private. The step-mother was cunning enough not to beat the step-daughter personally. She was a fraud to instigate others against her; she was seizing every chance to poison the mind of others. She looked at her only to find fault with her. Leaving the responsibility of household work to the girl, she drifted into a life of chewing betel leaf and gossiping with the shady womenfolk. So, even the farmer often used to beat the daughter. The step-mother thus created a very bad impression about the daughter. Thus, a slow quarrel had gone on for years. That was the beginning of a tragic end. In case of any fault by her own children, the step-mother could invent hundred excuses to protect them. She had courtly manners to win the favour of others; her defects & deficiencies, cunningly disguised, were as great as her gifts. The neighbours used to say :

'She is a good mother; she treats her step-daughter kindly'. But the step-daughter knew it was not so. To suppose an enemy to be a friend is disastrous.

One day, the step-mother directed the daughter to husk a good quantity of black sesame. The daughter, after finishing the daily chores, did her best to remove the black shell of the grains. It was her best performance. But the step-mother was there to find fault. While husking and winnowing, a little quantity of useless sesame had to be thrown out. The cruel step-mother said : Why you have thrown away sesame?

The daughter said : Mother! all those are useless. I have carefully husked and winnowed. I have not wasted even a single good grain.

The step-mother, not satisfied with the reply, became very angry and wild. The daughter apprehended a severe beating in the evening. All angry eyes fell on her. The step-brothers and the step-sisters were about to thrash her. For gloomily looking at them, the step-mother reproached the orphan girl and mollycoddled her own children.

For the first time her soul revolted; the pent-up anguish made an outburst. Oft-repeated bitter experience alienated her. The wretched daughter fervently made an earnest appeal to god. Never before did she make such an appeal. This time the response came from some doves. The doves plucked plumage from their own body, & dropped before her. She stuck them into her body and flew into the sky and started living with the doves. A great relief from the horrible pain; it did not affect the father even! After the real mother's death, some fathers marry again and behave like uncle. The capricious, domineering and unreflective step-mother and her children looked on!

Because of that persecution, the doves even today groan and repeat : Step-mother! bran, bran! (हाताई मागो! पूर पूर!). The doves wag their heads upward and downward and

try to convince the step-mother. The doves perch, and repeatedly groan and plead their innocence.

Even the father never attempted to relieve her mind. She found herself alone in the family, without the joys of the family hearth. She was mentally & physically tormented. Suddenly a ray of love & affection shone forth, bringing light & warmth into the innermost recesses.

An orphan's or a dependent's services or sacrifices are often neglected or ridiculed, and his/her weak points are usually pointed out and laughed at. Some people have a queer mentality; they cannot live without a dose of jealousy. In her next life, the step-mother became a stinging plant. (=*Bichhuti*). On summing up this story, the step-mother's attitude of hatred against the step-daughter would diffuse itself in gesture, in posture, in manner, in demeanour; it was too subtle to be usually observed by others, but at the same time, plain & palpable to the step-daughter! With a vanity of being the mother of a few children, the step-mother used to step, as if, as lightly as she hardly trod the earth. The miasma of such vices has been sickening the society.

46. Bhombaldas

Long ago there were two physically handicapped persons; they were residents of a village in the Meghna Valley. One person was blind of one eye; and another person was humpbacked. By the usual corruption of words & names in Bengal, the blind man was called *Kana,* and humpbacked person was called *Kubja* or *kuja; Kana* & *Kuja* were great friends.

Because of their physical deformity, they could not work effectively & efficiently. They became poor. They found no job in their locality. The rich peasants & landlords were reluctant to engage them in any work. Not only that, the youths would hoot, the ladies would chuckle, and the elderly persons would avoid them. Life became unbearable to them.

One day *Kana* & *Kuja* sat in the shade of a big banyan

tree to brood about their luck & life. After a lot of repentance and emotional outburst, they decided to leave their native village. They had no wife, no son, no daughter and none to support and sympathise.

So, on an auspicious day in the morning they left their native village. It was December. *Kana* & *Kuja* were rambling without any destination. With a stick in his hand, *Kuja* was walking limpingly; he had to slouch. *Kana* was physically thin, but mentally alert. *Kuja* was physically strong, but mentally blunt. They travelled & travelled for two days and three nights. They were walking along the narrow & low baulk & path through the rice fields. There were tall trees with branches against the sky. There was the hum of insects, and chirping of birds, and clanking of bells in the neck of cattle. Disgusted with life & luck, *Kana* & *Kuja* were indifferent to the natural beauty. They slept on a haystack, after taking food offered by an unknown peasant family.

On the way, on the last day they found a tortoise. *Kuja* asked : There is a big tortoise; what shall I do? *Kana* said : Take it in your hump. After moving a distance, they found a plough, a leveller & a rope. *Kuja* asked : What shall I do with these instruments? *Kana* said: Take the instruments in your hump.

Hungry & thirsty, they hobbled slowly along the tracks, and in the evening reached a deserted hamlet. There they found a nice but lonely homestead. There was shivering cold. They entered the house and slept inside. The night passed. But about an hour before dawn, *Kana* heard a queer sound. Being wakeful, *Kana* awakened *Kuja*. The outsiders were ghosts. The homestead belonged to the ghosts. They got the smell of human body from the courtyard. They angrily asked : Who are you inside?

Kana replied boastfully : I am lion's maternal uncle. The ghosts asked : What is your name?

Kana replied : Bhombaldas.

The ghosts asked : What have you done?

Kana replied : I have killed one hundred & fifty tigers.

The ghosts asked : What is the proof? We like to see a louse of your head. *Kana* thrust the tortoise at them across the courtyard. Being afraid, the ghosts ran away and vanished.

In the morning they saw the beautiful garden house, pond, paddy fields and flowers. It was alluring and at the same time mysterious. Who were the outsiders?

The two friends collected fruits and ate and bathed in the pond. They decided to stay there and observe the situation. But the next night they had the same suspicious experience. The ghosts came back. The ghosts asked : Who are you inside?

Kana confidently replied : I am lion's maternal uncle, Bhombaldas. I have killed 150 tigers.

The ghosts asked : We like to see your hair. *Kana* thrust the rope at them across the courtyard. Terribly afraid, the ghosts fled quickly.

The two friends had enough of rest, but indirectly encountered the mysterious outsiders again.

The ghosts asked : Who are you inside?

Kana replied daringly : I am lion's maternal uncle, Bhombaldas. I have hunted as many as 150 tigers.

The ghosts asked : We like to see your comb. *Kana* thrust the leveller at them across the courtyard. Terribly afraid, the ghosts had to pop off the place immediately.

The two friends met the challenge for three nights. Now they had nothing to meet the next challenge. They were worried. Fortunately, that day one *Sadhu* accompanied by a few pilgrims came there and halted there for rest, wash and food. The two friends felt relieved and narrated the queer experience. The *Sadhu* sat calmly and meditated for a while. In meditation it revealed to him that it was the house of a rich peasant; the peasant had his wife & children; they, all on a sudden, died of cholera. There was none to perform funeral rites.

Being earnestly requested by the two friends, the

Sadhu stayed there for a few days and started *Harinam Samkirtan* & performed funeral rites. Surprisingly, the ghosts did not come from that very night. Being directed by the *Sadhu*, the pilgrims went to *Gaya dham* and offered *Pindadan* for the salvation of those souls.

Henceforth, *Kana* & *Kuja* stayed in the big garden house, and fervently appealed to the *Sadhu* to stay with them and to make the house an *asram*. The saint agreed. The *sevasram* became the halting place for the pilgrims.

47. Perils in a deserted village

There was an ancient village in the Meghna Valley of the western part of Tripura. It was a deserted village. In 1854 the British administration demarcated the boundary between the Meghna Valley and the kingdom of hill Tripura. The boundary line was demarcated to fix the responsibility of the king of Tripura and the British administration against the recurrent crimes of raids from the side of some hills people.

That very ancient village was located near the line of demarcation; it fell within the Meghna Valley region. The village had a queer atmosphere with broken shrines, & tombs and very tall trees & bushes and marshes. Strange tales were told of the remote village. The village was thinly populated. Cultivators were settling on the lands which the British administration had made partly secure.

One peasant family settled in that deserted village. The peasant had cleared the jungles, built a hut and cultivated the nearby lands. There was no other family in the immediate neighbourhood. There was a narrow jungle track between the eastern hills and the western valley. The valley had a number of weekly markets scattered here & there. The hills people would travel for many miles across the precipitous jungle country for sale & purchase in the weekly market. With tired body and begrimed feet, they would halt in the hut of the peasant, for a wash, rest and food (= *mocha bhat= maidul*).

The peasant had his wife and only one son. One day

the peasant fell ill. There was no physician in the vicinity. The peasant's sister was married; she was living at a distant village. The sister's son was a youth. But the peasant's son was merely a child. The peasant's wife was keeping watch over the dying husband; she was frightened at the thought of the impending crisis.

It was the weekly market-day; the peasant breathed his last. The worried wife requested the hills people to inform the sister's son. The hills people knew him and he was usually expected to come to the market. But unfortunately that day the sister's son did not come. The hills people were requested to say like this : *Bhagina!* you must go to your maternal uncle's house at once. The hills people sincerely and sympathetically searched but did not find him. They reported it accordingly while going back home.

The widow was in serious anxiety. The peasant was dead, and he had died within the hut. The hour of midnight drew near. Crushed by distress & disappointment, the heart-broken widow shut herself up and became almost a recluse temporarily. The hut was in complete darkness. An uneasiness assailed her. Sleep did not come to her eyes. Meanwhile, she heard a voice. Roused by the sound, she sat up. The outsider in a nasal tone said : *Mami! Mami!* I have got the sad news; so, I have come here. Do not worry; I do not require any light. I require only one packet of salt to protect & preserve the deadbody. The widow supplied a packet of salt and retired to the next room. As a little calm of mind returned, the widow tried to sleep; her little son fell asleep by her side.

The outsider sat near the corpse with the packet of salt. He was glad in his heart, thinking of the feast. The outsider who pretended to be the nephew of the peasant, started a mysterious game, a horrible, a terrible game. He seized the corpse, tore it from limb to limb. The pretender was crunching the deadbody and devouring

the human flesh. A cannibal! The sound of snapping made the widow extremely anxious. She was in great suspense. She felt that something was going to happen. Anything might happen under the cover of darkness. She stood up silently and peeped at, but darkness blurred the view. She became certain about something mysterious and ominous.

Now what to do? She should not wait any moment. Indeed, she could not stand it any longer. She must go away immediately. But how? she pinched the child to give pain. The child shuddered & cried out. The boy's eyes were blinking against drowsiness. The boy looked up at his mother. The mother closed & pressed the lips of the boy. The pretender stopped snapping and asked from the adjacent room: *Mami*? why is he crying? There is no fear. I am here to guard you.

The widow replied: *Bhagina*, your brother will go on a nature's call. This is why he is crying. The pretender again said : *Mami!* should I come? The widow said : *Bhagina!* you need not come. I am going with the child. I shall bring him back soon.

Taking the child in her bossom, the widow opened the next door and came out at dead of night. Ahead of her was a valley, a dry field, shrouded in a thick mist. Like a wounded animal, she rushed headlong from the hut. Five minutes passed; the widow did not come back. The pretender came out of the room and called out tauntingly : *Mami! Mami!* where have you gone? I have finished the *Mama.* Now, I like to relish your fresh flesh. I am eager to devour the brother! *Mami!* come soon! come soon!

The widow rushed and rushed! She ran in a violent hurry. At a long distance there was a house of another peasant. She cried & sat down aghast. The peasant gave her shelter in an empty, husking pedal hut next to his. Because of uncleanliness caused by death, she was given shelter in the pedal hut. The widow and the child slept

alongside the pet dogs. When one is extremely exhausted & worried, and the night is cold, one is temporarily satisfied with any kind of protection. The peasant offered some food, but the widow refused because of the uncleanliness. The peasant spread a bundle of dry grass. Her thudding heart eased to a normal rhythm. The widow & the child slept safely till dawn.

The night passed. The sun was not long in coming. The sun's edge was peering over the hills. When the red tinge had been visible in the eastern horizon, the widow rose up. The morning of December was very cold. Now was the time to walk back. The wise peasant along with his wife, sons and servants accompanied the widow. They spoke but little; their minds were busied by thoughts of what had happened during the previous night.

On reaching the lonely & gloomy hut, what did they see? A heap of broken bones, and no corpse! The bed was stinking strong & offensive smell! Ants, insects and flies swarmed the nasty bed! The bloodstained floor was littered with nasty clothes, hair, nail, skin & intestine, etc.

48. Tragedy at Tal dighi

In a certain area of the western part of Tripura there was a very big and deep tank. It was made lovely by a cluster of tall palm trees. So the tank was popularly known as *Tal dighi*. The adjacent area was marked by the absence of human habitation. The popular belief was that there must be some vicious nymph in the water of the tank. So the people would never use its water. The local people were very afraid of the nymph. According to their belief, the nymph was a young and beautiful goddess of water.

One day, a father and his young daughter were passing by the side of the tank. They were residents of a distant village. Their destination was a long way away. They were ignorant about the nymph. They grew weary and sat down to rest in the shade of a tree of the tank. The thirsty daughter went into knee-deep water to drink water. Surprisingly, one iron chain gripped her leg. She

cried out, and the father hastened for rescue. She was trembling. He pulled with all his energy and brought her ashore. But they failed to undo or untie the grip of the chain. The daughter went on weeping and the father cried out loudly seeking help. A large crowd thronged there and the young boys pulled the chain. Even an elephant was engaged for pulling the chain. The chain was very, very long and endless. The chain was coiled into a high heap. It continued for seven days & seven nights.

At last, the father had a dream. The nymph said : It is futile to try to rescue & relieve your daughter. I am alone, I wish to carry her off. I shall not kill her.

The people stopped the rescue operation. In presence of hundreds of people, the chain started winding up. Before the eyes of hundreds of people and before the eyes of the brokenhearted father, the forlorn daughter was carried inside the water. She cried and cried.

At the centre of the tank there was a small temple. The tower of the temple was visible above the surface of the water. At the tip of the tower, one golden plate occasionally used to move rapidly. Once a year the daughter would be allowed for a few minutes to come out and sit on the moving plate. The air blew her hair into her face. Her presence flashed like a lighting. She used to weep for her parents & relations. Thousands of people used to throng for a glance of the daughter.

In exchange for kidnapping the daughter, the water nymph assured the people to lend the required number of plate, glass, bowl, pan, etc. on such occasions as birth, first rice giving ceremony, initiation, marriage & death. For this, the concerning family would be required to clean & wash a portion of the bank of the tank, put incense & light a lamp. After the ceremony, the utensils must be returned carefully. On several occasions the utensils were made available. The practice continued for many years.

One day one such a family took advantage of the

duly borrowed utensils. The next day, after thoroughly washing the utensils, returned those articles, except one. Surprisingly, the chain did not come to take back the utensils. It became an issue of common gossip & rumour. In fact, one greedy lady of the family secretly kept one very beautiful bowl hidden inside the heap of cowdung. At night while asleep, she dreamed a very horrible dream. The nymph threatened to destroy the lady's entire family & clan for the mischief!

The next morning the lady unearthed the bowl, cleaned it thoroughly, returned it duly and prayed the water-goddess to forget & forgive. Immediately the mysterious chain came to take back the utensils. Henceforth, the nymph stopped lending. The people angrily blamed that lady. They were deprived of the benefit.

The tank was very old, but its water was clean. The length of the tank was in the north-south direction. The people were never seen relieving themselves in the water; they did not spoil and soil the tank. According to popular belief, the tank was a *devottar* land, dedicated to a deity long, long ago. The tank's four surrounding banks were equally wide and well-built; the banks had defied centuries of flood, heavy rainfall and storm.

After a few years of that incidence of covetousness, one year had an exceptionally heavy rainfall during July-August. All day black clouds had been racing over the sky, carrying a deluge of rain in the evening. It was a terrible night of thunder, lightning, hailstorm and heavy cloudburst. The surrounding area was in inundation. The tank's west bank ruptured at the middle point, making an easy outlet of water channel for the nymph to retire to the sea with her big wooden chest full of utensils and the forlorn daughter.

The deluge and the departure of the deity were followed by a period of lull. The peoples were leading their usual way of life. After a few years, another

disturbance came there. A new nymph appeared and resided on trees. The new nymph is called *jin*. The *jin* terrible would be found in inauspicious times & dark nights; he would bestride with one leg on the tallest palm tree of the old tank and another leg on another very tall tree in a distant cremation ground. The terrible *jin* would ask the passersby to pass under his legs. An unsuspecting passerby trying to pass through, would be strangled. The *jin* killed many passers and peasants. The *jin* created a havoc, a terror. The people stopped moving in the evening and at night.

To get rid of the *jin* the *gaon* panchayets of seven villages had met together and requested the priests, shamans & magicians to do the needful. The priests, shamans & magicians, in turn, selected from among themselves the veteran *ojhai*. In one dark night the *ojhai* pretended to be an ordinary peasant and started walking along the banks of the tank. Suddenly, the *jin* appeared and asked him to pass under his very tall legs. The *ojhai* disagreed and asked the *jin* to pass under the legs of the *ojhai*. The bargaining continued. It was a time of suspense. The *ojhai* threw on the *jin* a handful of dust charged with some spells. Instantaneously, the *jin* surrendered and went to pass under the legs of the *ojhai*. The *ojhai* threw on the *jin* another handful of dust and made him a captive. Now the *jin* behaved like an obedient servant. The *ojhai* asked : Who are you ? what is your history ? His recounting was pathetic & thrilling.

He narrated thus : 'I had been a Brahman. I was handsome & healthy. When the foreign hordes started plundering, killing & raping in our house, I resisted. After a scuffle, they kidnapped me & packed off to a distant land. They directed me to accept their religion. I rejected it. They became furious & went on abusing, beating, kicking me. I was unable to endure; I had to commit suicide. If any kindhearted Brahman duly performs my funeral ceremony at Gaya, I shall get salvation from

hellish sufferings. I shall no longer put the people to troubles.

The *ojhai* narrated the history. The *gaon* panchayet sent two priests to perform the *pindadan* ceremony at Gaya.

49. An epicurean thug

A young man lived in a certain village of the Meghna Valley. He had no parents, no brother, no sister. He was a handsome masher. He was shirker, epicure and poor.

In the same village there was an old widow. She had no husband, no son, no daughter. She had a milch cow. Because of old age, she was unable to supply milk to the shop of a confectioner. The young man one day came and said : Grandmother, grandmother! may I serve you? Every day in the morning I shall carry the pot of milk to the shop of the confectioner.

The poor widow said : But I have no money to pay for your service. If you kindly render the service, I shall remain grateful to you. The youngman said : Grandmother! you need not pay anything in cash; you give me tiffin only in the morning. The widow agreed.

The young man started serving and supplying milk. The widow used to offer fried rice, beaten rice, etc. to the youngman. While carrying the pot, he used to add a quantity of water to the pure milk. Initially, he did not demand anything for the additional quantity of milk. After a few days he indirectly indicated his desire for a *Rasogolla.* So the confectioner used to give him a stale sweetmeat almost daily. The young man was satisfied with that.

One day at midday, a grocer lay asleep in the house at the backyard, leaving behind his little son in the shop. It was a small grocery; the villagers used to pass by the front-side of the shop and to purchase necessary things. It was midday; the tired peasants lay asleep. The young man went to the shop and said to the boy : My name is bee; I am hungry; give me a quantity of honey free of

cost. The boy sought the permission of his father. The drowsy father replied from the bed : How much will a bee drink? Give him what he wants.

After a fortnight, one day at midday in a separate village another grocer lay asleep in his living room at the backyard, leaving behind his little son in the shop. Located in a rural village, the shop had few customers; the peasants fell asleep at noon. The young *thug* reached there at that time and started conversation with the boy in a friendly spirit, and then sought a quantity of sugar free of cost. He said : My name is ant; I am hungry, please give me a handful of sugar. The boy said loudly : Father! father! one ant wants a little quantity of sugar. What shall I do? The father replied: How much will an ant eat? Give him what he wants. The son gave sugar. The *thug* relished it and left.

After about a month, one day at midday in a distant village another grocer lay asleep in his living room at the backyard, leaving behind his little son in the shop. The shop had an earthen jar full of fresh molasses. The *thug* saw the jar, and he could not resist his temptation. He entered the shop & sat on a long bench and pretended to be very exhausted. He said: Dear boy! my name is fly. I am very tired & hungry. Kindly give me a quantity of molasses as gift. The boy was hesitant. The trickster said : Dear boy! you may report to your father that a fly is eager to eat molasses. The boy accordingly cried out to his drowsy father. The half asleep father shouted back : How much will a little fly eat? Give him what he wants. The boy gave a handful quantity of molasses to the trickster. The trickster thanked & left the shop.

50. Two cheats

In a certain village lived a peasant family. The peasant had his wife and a son. The peasant used to go to the field with plough & a pair of bullox at dawn. It was the normal task of the wife to bring food to the field at about 8 A.M. or 9 A.M.

The son, now aged sixteen, carries food to the field.

It is almost a daily duty during the summer and the rainy season. One day the wife prepared beaten rice and the son was asked to carry the fresh, warm beaten rice along with a quantity of molasses. On the way the boy could not restrain his greed; he ate one handful after one handful of the tasty beaten rice. He became conscious when the stock had been exhausted. Now what to do? The mother may rebuke, the father may beat! The boy was going on foot along the narrow baulk & path through the fields; he sat down there weeping.

In the meantime, a middle-aged cheat was going along the same path. He said to the boy : Why are you weeping? The boy made a correct reply. The cheat said : It is a serious crime; you will be severely beaten. There is a way out. If you act according to my instruction, your skin will be saved. You go back home and tell your mother : My father has purchased a milch cow at a cost of twenty rupees. Give me twenty rupees. The mother, having collected money from the folds of rags & tags, hanging jars & bamboo pipes, handed over twenty coins.

The swindler caught the boy in a trap. He was, as if, cast by nature for lying & cheating. He was indeed, adept in these arts. The imprudent boy had been drawn into it by ill company. It was fated to change the course of his life. The villain and the victim made long strides in adventure to escape the hand of the peasant. The peasant hungrily and angrily came home at noon. They questioningly talked to each other, and came to know the treachery of the son. They were in entire ignorance of the cheating.

The villain & the victim passed village after village. On the way they purchased food out of that amount of twenty rupees. So long as the money had been with them, the cheat was with the boy. By that time, he devised to desert the boy and slip. He asked the boy to take rest at a distance, and himself pretended to be the father of the boy and made a proposal to a shopkeeper of selling the

boy. The merchant agreed and paid. Taking the money the cheat quickly left the place.

The boy, after sometime, became restless and hungry. He came to the shop for some food. The merchant offered food and told : I have purchased you and paid money to your father. The boy was shocked, but he had to serve the merchant. He narrated the previous history; & continued to serve the merchant sincerely and thus earned his sympathy. The boy got redemption after several months of hard labour. He set out; he had no fixed destination.

The boy became a wanderer. He was actually searching the villain and seeking an opportunity to pounce upon the swindler. He roamed and roamed apparently aimlessly. At last he saw the swindler and fell at his feet without giving the slightest hint of his inner intention. They pretended to be preceptor and disciple. There was hardly a day passed without some minor offence of cheating committed by the two swindlers. A rapacious expression would often flit across their face.

One day the two swindlers reached a village where a very rich peasant lived. The peasant had a big pond in front of his garden-house. There was an old banyan tree on the bank of the big pond. In the shade of the tree the two cheats sat down. The young cheat had a ring. With the elder cheat's permission, the young cheat alone went inside and proposed to sell not the ring, but the elder cheat. The peasant agreed. The young cheat raised his had and asked the elder cheat : Shall I sell? The elder cheat replied : Sell, sell. The peasant honestly paid sixty rupees for the hard-working labourer! The young cheat decamped with money, while the elder cheat was kept in bondage.

The young cheat went to a market & purchased some food and then bought a healthy horse. He rode and drove through a forest path. He was astonished to find a beautiful garden-house inside the forest. The sun was setting; the evening was falling. He sought a shelter. An old woman, seven wives and children came forward to see the strange

fellow. He told the old woman : Grandmother! I am tired and hungry! I am alone! I am afraid of moving ahead at night! kindly allow me to stay here for this night only. The old woman consulted her daughters-in-law before giving permission. In course of conversation he gleaned that it was a house of dacoits. The old woman's seven sons were all dacoits. That afternoon they had already set out riding on seven horses.

The cheat made a stratagem to rob the robbers. He put his coins inside a banana leaf-packet and made his horse swallow the packet. In the next morning, while the horse had been excreting, the coins came out along with the discharge. It was purposely displayed to the children and the women. He told : This is a rare type of horse; the horse daily excretes coins. The women became tempted, inquisitive and interested to purchase the horse. A dacoity in the house of the dacoits! An extraordinary incident! A sheer bluff!

The cheat left the house of the dacoits and made long strides to go beyond the reach of the dacoits. From a long distance he saw the dacoits riding & speeding through the paths homeward bound. How to escape their inquisitive eyes? At a little distance he saw a washerman washing the clothes of a royal household. By another stratagem he frightened & confused the washerman; he said : Washerman! you have stolen some clothes of the royal household; so, the king's police forces are coming, see, see ! The nervous washerman sought his help. He directed him to hide under a heap of hay. The cheat pretended to be a washerman, washing the clothes and hiding the bag of coins.

Like a sudden gust of wind, the dacoits speedily passed the washing *ghat* without asking any question to the washerman. On arrival, the dacoits were astonished and shocked to know the news of the incident. Leaving the bag & baggage, the dacoits turned back speedily and found the pretender; they asked the pretender whether he had seen

such a man. He replied in the positive and raised his finger towards the rick. The dacoits got down, searched the rick and twitched the actual washerman and rushed back home. They fastened him with a cord and asked the children to kick him. After taking rest and food, they asked him several questions. The ladies were paraded to identify. The ladies said : He is not the actual cheat. Being released, the actual washerman narrated what had happened in the washing *ghat*. They again galloped, but the actual cheat fled away very fast with the booty and the clothes. The dacoits retired.

The cheat moved forward. On the way there was a big river. There was a ferry under the care of an old woman and her granddaughter. The two women were very poor. It was the grandmother's headache to arrange the marriage of her granddaughter. The cheat made a mockery of friendship and pretended to be a liberal young man. He showed them the costly clothes, and shook the bag and jingled the coins. He proposed to marry without any dowry. They agreed and assured to arrange the ceremony within a few days. But on the pretext of his mother's illness, the cheat eloped with the granddaughter suddenly. The grandmother shouted to the people asking them to chase and capture the grandson-in-law. The people replied : Taking the granddaughter by the grandson-in-law is quite natural. Will he take you, grandmother?

Now the young cheat turned his steps towards home with money and wife. The parents became very happy. All their anger vanished. The atmosphere of the home again became afresh with joy. The villagers came to see the son and the wife. But here too he conspired to cheat the neighbours. He said : I have travelled a long distance to a distant town to learn the technique of minting coins. By that technique I have earned a large amount of money.

After a few months, the senior cheat happened to

visit the house of the junior cheat. Now the two cheats are equally adept. They again came to an understanding to undertake any enterprise which would bring profit. The two misfit delinquents became a money-making racket. A wide publicity was given to their new enterprise : money duplicating business. If anybody furnishes one rupee, next day two rupees will be supplied. That was the rate. Many poor people came with their meagre stock and got double the amount. Thus they earned popularity. It was their confidence trick. One day a rich peasant came with a large amount of money. Having shielded themselves from distrust, they were able to attract the attention and temptation of the rich peasant.

The customers were in entire ignorance of the evil design of the cheats. By establishing a rapport, they had in mind to decamp with a large chunk of money. The moment that amount had come, they fled and retired into a distant, deep forest.

But how to continue there in the hills and jungles without food and comforts of life? So they pretended to be hermits with long beard and hair and a particular dress. Sometimes, they would pretend to be beggars. But the two would never go together.

One day the senior cheat went out to purchase some sweetmeat; he ate to his heart's content sitting in the confectioner's shop and bought a quantity of sweetmeat in an earthen pot. But he deceitfully poisoned the sweetmeat. The junior cheat went a step further; he lay in ambush with a sharp knife in hand. The senior cheat was unaware of it. The evening was falling. The place was dark, lonely & sylvan. The moment the senior cheat had crossed the spot, the junior cheat coldly & quickly pounced upon him and stabbed him to death. The hungry junior cheat swallowed the sweetmeat and died on the spot. Thus the two arch-criminals were fated to die together.

51. A cheat & a fool

In a certain village lived a cheat and a fool. The cheat was a well-known *thug* and shirker. He was never found to plough, to weed, to harvest, to fish and to repair. If there was a feast or a festival, a meeting or a congregation, he would be there. He utterly lost his credibility. So it became extremely difficult for him to maintain the family. He was plunged into great distress. The cheat and his wife, after much deliberation, found an alternative : the cheat will make friendship with the fool, and then the two friends will often pass secretly about midnight for stealing.

The cheat and his wife started visiting the house of the fool. A few days passed in reciprocal inquiries. After a conversation of this nature, they became friends. Now, the cheat said: Friend! both of us are very poor; we are on the verge of starvation. Let us make nocturnal venture and steal crops & vegetables. The idiot replied : Friend! if you guide, I shall follow you. The cheat assured : Do not think, I am here to manage.

It was the month of *Agrahayana* (=November-December). The paddy became ripe. The cheat made a survey at day time. About midnight the two friends set out and reaped. The cheat asked the idiot : Friend! will you take the top end or the bottom end? The idiot answered : I shall take the bottom end. So the idiot took the useless stubble, and the cheat had the useful paddy. Quite obviously, the fool's wife rebuked the fool that night.

After a few days, they passed to steal sugarcane. They cut down and piled. At the time of division, the cheat asked : Friend! will you take the top end or the bottom end? The fool instantaneously replied : I shall take the top end. He, therefore, got the twigs, while the cheat got the actual sugarcane. On that night also the fool's wife chided her husband.

Next, they made an adventure to steal pumpkin. Its plant and fruit are edible. At the time of stealing, the

plant was flowering only. They cut down the green and fresh plants. On being asked by the cheat, the fool expressed his option for the hard, bottom end; and the cheat took the soft & delicious top ends. As usual, the fool's wife criticised her husband.

Being rebuked by the wife, the fool became cautious and demanded the top end in advance. This time they attempted to steal radish. They jointly uprooted the edible plants. The cheat asked : Friend! what will you take as your share? The fool took the top ends, that is, the leaves, while the cheat took the edible bottom ends. The idiocy of the fool benumbed his wife. She became very angry. Is it friendship?

Next, they proceeded to steal brinjal. Here too, the idiot committed mistake and the cheat deceived. The idiot claimed the bottom end and received the useless plants, while the fraud bluffed & took the fruits. Once again the fool found himself with nothing, and the cheat & his wife enjoying themselves.

Afterwards, the trickster led the idiot to steal potato. The idiot claimed the top end and got the useless plants, while the fraud picked up the edible tubers. The fool's wife was about to beat her husband. The cheat's wife stopped visiting the fool's house from the very start of cheating.

Later, the two thieves went to steal *mankachu*, (= one kind of arum). The fool changed the strategy and cut down the top ends for himself. He came out with a bundle of useless leaves. The cheat took time to uproot the fleshy plants. The owner of the plants got a hint and pounced upon the cheat. The idiot fled.

The cheat got a good beating. He had to take rest for a month. The idiot visited the house of the cheat. The cheat and his wife severely scolded the idiot for escaping alone, for only one occasion of unfriendly behaviour !

Finally, they went to steal *jalkachu* (=one kind of arum grown in marshy places). This time, they decided to divide

vertically, and share equally. But in that marshy place lived a very poisonous snake. The snake bit the fraud. The pain was very severe. The fool took the cheat on his shoulder and rushed towards home. Before the arrival of the *ojha,* the cheat breathed his last.

52. How three cheats befooled a Brahman

In ancient Tripura on the bank of the river Gomati lived a Brahman. He had his wife; but he had no son. The Brahman was poor but pious. He was a priest.

The couple had a great desire for a son. So, they devoted themselves to the worship of Siva and Tripurasundari Kalimata, suffering bodily penance. Then the god being pleased, granted the boon. The couple vowed to sacrifice a hegoat to the god. In course of time, the Brahman's wife gave birth to a son.

The couple, being happy with a son, decided to sacrifice a hegoat. The Brahman went to a distant weekly market in the late afternoon for purchasing a hegoat. He purchased fruits, sweetmeats, vegetables and one hegoat. It took time. In the evening he turned his steps homeward.

Three cheats saw the Brahman coming back home. The villains put their heads together to befool the Brahman and to relish the hegoat's meat. They sat down, at an interval of half a mile, watching the path along which the Brahman would come. They were waiting while the Brahman was yet a long way off. They were keeping a distance from each other.

Now as the Brahman passed on, the first cheat said : *Purohitji!* why are you carrying a shegoat on your shoulder? The Brahman replied : This is a hegoat for sacrifice. I have purchased it from the market. The first cheat said : But the salesman put a false symbol. The Brahman said : Everybody knows me. How shall I be cheated?

Paying little attention to the passing remark, the Brahman, overburdened with load, went ahead. After

some distance, the second rogue met him. The rogue said : *Thakur Mahashay!* what happened to you? Why are you carrying a shegoat on your shoulder?

On hearing that, the Brahman took off the animal from his shoulder, & placed the animal on the ground and examined the identification mark and resumed his walk with a wavering mind.

It was twilight. There was no street-light in those days. For travel at night, the people had to use bamboo-torch light (=*chunga batti*). When the Brahman had moved further and passed through another turning of the path, the third knave said : *Guruji!* why have you purchased this shegoat? You are a priest. Do you like to have a goat-herd?

Now, the simple-hearted Brahman became confused indeed. He was led into bewilderment. Being puzzled, perplexed & disgusted, the Brahman left the animal on the spot. He went on grumbling and cursing the salesman.

The three deceivers met together and decamped with the hegoat for a relish.

53. A thing of barbarity is a joy for a moment

There was a village in the Meghna Valley of western Tripura. A peasant family lived there long ago with his wife and four children : three sons and one daughter. The peasant was a bit cruel, unkind & selfish. He had only a few friends in the village. Some cunning people of the village set their children to entice the peasant's sons & to lead them astray. The sons became addicted to smoking & chewing.

When the children became adolescent, the peasant arranged their marriage one after another. Within a month of the marriage of the first son, the daughter-in-law slowly started to make a mess of things. She tended to delay & procrastinate. The eldest son used to support her and guard her. So they were separated. The new couple got their own hearth & home and land. Now, they started rising very early in the morning & doing all jobs.

The next year the peasant arranged the marriage of the second son. Instigating her husband against the members of the family, the second daughter-in-law used to pretend to be sober. The second son started quarrelling with the parents on trifling grounds. Wheedling the people, the second daughter-in-law used to collect some secret news & keep her husband informed. She would outwardly criticise her husband & praise the people; but examined deeply, the criticism was praise, & the praise was criticism. Her etiquettes were deceptive. Their hidden motive was to break up. So the peasant allowed them to live separately, to cook & eat separately.

The next year the peasant arranged the marriage of the third son. The third daughter-in-law could not tolerate the peasant's daughter. The third son used to take the side of his wife and to blame the sister. The sister was made a scapegoat for any misdeed. So the peasant allowed the couple to build their own hearth & home. He was in similar situation for three times.

Meanwhile, the peasant's wife fell ill. She was lucky to get the service of her husband & daughter. After a few months of illness, the aged woman died. The sons performed the funeral rites and shared the necessary expenditure.

The peasant became mentally wounded. Moreover, he had the burden of arranging the marriage of his only daughter. He was not a rich man. With all his little savings, he arranged the marriage of his daughter. The daughter left the parental home.

The peasant now really felt lonely. The sons were separated, the wife died, the daughter married elsewhere. The children were to fend for themselves only. The old, pauper, forlorn peasant felt utterly neglected by the children. The afflicted peasant used to plaintively groan & moan. The sons & the daughters-in-law continued to behave wickedly & continued to be negligent. He searched in every direction and called; no one responded.

One day, one friend of the peasant came to see him. The two friends had a hearty discussion in whispering voice. The friend gave him a few coins and advised him to count the coins at night. So the peasant intentionally caused to make jingling sound of the coins. It worked wonder.

The clinking sound of the metallic coins alerted & allured the sons & the daughters-in-law. One couple heard the sound; they slowly & surreptitiously proceeded & stood under the eaves & near the window to listen the jingling sound of the coins. The next morning, the first daughter-in-law came with a smiling face and with tiffin in her hand. She listened to his demand with seeming respect.

Next, the second couple became suspicious; they too committed eavesdropping and heard the jingling sound. The second daughter-in-law equally turned helpful.

The third couple became curious to see the sudden change. They, too, committed the same eavesdropping. They, too, started looking after the old father with a friendly feeling.

A cheat meeting a cheat! Now he stopped jingling. The purpose was served. He paid back the coins secretly. It was his habit to lard his speech with the word *satan* & to talk in snarl.

54. A spoiled child

A peasant family lived in a village. The peasant had his wife and son. The couple had to work as servants in the houses of their neighbours. The peasant fell ill and died. After two years the widow also died, leaving behind her teenaged son.

The son was very industrious and cheerful. He used to remain always occupied with some kind of work. He, too, had to work as labourer in the fields of others. For his honesty and hardworking habit he enjoyed the affection of the elders. Every day he used to get job. Thus within a few years he improved his lot. Every year

he started purchasing land. He was a practical man, a specimen of Bengal peasant life.

Now he is a young man and owner of lands. His name and fame became well-known. He married a poor and docile girl. He was in delight with land and lady. The couple were laborious, simple and god-fearing folk, free from vulgarity and vices. Their union had been soul to soul. Their marriage was a socio-economic partnership. She used to cook at home and bring food to the field for her husband. Thus she came to know every field, every crop, every cattle. The couple used to discuss : what field was ploughed; what plot was purchased; what was the price; what stock was born or sold; what quantity of seeds was required for each plot; what types of vegetables were to be cultivated and sold; she shared his toil. She used to weed, reap and bring home crops and vegetables. Thus, by mutual love and labour, they became rich with well-stocked farm of cattle, goat, pigeon, duck, and lands, and ponds teemed with fish. His cottage swarmed with domestic animals & birds.

So, they had been feeling happy for years together. The birth of a son added to their happiness. They had great affection for the son. The blind tenderness was too much; they would not allow the son to do any work. He grew very much dependent on the parents. Thus, the boy became idle, idiot and epicurean. He could not eat without fish curry. The couple did not care to think about the injury that a father or a mother can do to a son or daughter by pampering and attaching them too closely : 'He is too little to do work alone!' (हेते लातुरा पोला)

In the midst of his progress & prosperity, his wife suddenly died. It was a terrible shock. He lost his energy and enthusiasm, interest & initiative.

The peasant sighed and began to think of getting rid of the family responsibilities. The family did not get time to arrange the marriage of the son.

At the eleventh hour of his life, the father gave the

son three important instructions :

1. I have not made a mess of things. I have to bequeath to you well-stocked farm and fertile land and ponds. So, you may eat fish with every morsel of food.
2. Do not repair house every year. Build a house once.
3. In case of any difficulty or danger, seek advice from a very old man.

The peasant did not live long. The thought of his son's future kept him anxious & worried. The anxiety became acute after his wife's death.

In his death bed, he often tossed from side to side. He had to lie awake the greater part of night and then one day he breathed his last. The neighbours rendered all sorts of cooperation in the performance of cremation and funeral rites. On the day of *Sraddha* ceremony, all the villagers were invited and entertained with food.

After about one year, the boy married a beautiful & smart girl of a middle class family from a suburban village. She was reluctant to go to the field, to look after the cattle, to take care of the crops and vegetables. She was interested in graceful dress and ornaments. She was not a working partner. She was a woman-with-her-own-life. Her mother-in-law was a hub-of-the-family.

The boy, to remain very faithful to the advice of his father, used to eat big fish like *Ruhu, Katla, Mrigel,* every day. If such fish was not available from his pond, he had to purchase from fishermen.

According to the second advice, he repaired and rebuilt the paternal house only once with such materials as bamboo, cane, thatching grass, and wooden pillar which need to be replaced after every three or four years. But the boy did not repair the house even after four or five years. The house became very unsteady, uninhabitable and dilapidated because of the ravages of time. During the rainy season, goods & chattels would be damaged. The tinkling sound of the rains on utensils would disturb his sleep; water would seep through the roof.

But he stuck to the advice of his father! And continued to live there and eat big fish daily.

All these incidents indicate the character of the boy. He had neither intelligence nor industriousness. So, dangers & difficulties dogged him. He started selling lands every year. The father had expanded; the son contracted. Obviously, the paternal estate became smaller and smaller. A naive may be drowned in his father's pond.

When it was at last reduced to the minimum, the son brooded sullenly on the advice of his father. But he was not capable of analysing it himself. Now, the third advice came to his mind. He left home, travelled, travelled for a few days, and reached a distant village and met an octogenarian old man. The old man, with his wit & wisdom, explained : Your father had great affection for you; he gave you advice in figurative speech. The literal meaning of the first advice is that you should live in plenty & pleasure; you need not eat big fish actually; you may eat small fish. Even to eat fish daily is not good for health. About the second advice your father had it to say that you should have built a pucca house of bricks, cement & iron, etc. which has a lifelong duration.

The old man's explanation brought the son to his senses. He returned with a changed outlook. He began to understand. He started to work as a daily labourer in the fields of neighbours. Now he became thrifty & practical. He became set in the peasant life.

55. Two dissimilar brothers

There was a poor peasant family in the Meghna Valley of Tripura. The peasant had to work in the fields of his neighbours as a labourer. The peasant was insensible, and his wife was wicked. The family had a small garden house, and a milch cow and a cot with a quilt and a few utensils. The husband and the wife died, shortly after one another, leaving behind two orphan boys.

The two orphan brothers were in great distress. A few generous neighbours came forward with their helping

hands. They engaged them to tend their cattle. The employer provided food & clothe, but no salary in cash. Thus, petted by all, the two brothers grew through childhood to boyhood leading a peasant life of tending the cattle, cleaning the cowshed, fishing, swimming and cutting green grass for the cows.

That way of life continued until the elder brother came to his fifteenth year, and the younger brother came to his thirteenth year. But that way of life was destined to a dramatic interruption. The elder brother was very dull & simple, while the younger brother was very cunning and crafty.

One summer morning the younger brother came with a deceptive proposal of arranging the marriage of the elder brother. After two days, the younger brother came with the real proposal of dividing the paternal property. He said: Elder brother! our patrimony is very small; so there is no necessity to invite & request the village council to mediate.

The elder brother agreed. So it was almost wordlessly arranged between the two brothers. The division of patrimony of three items took place by a mutual understanding thus :

1. The quilt to be used by the elder brother during day time, & to be used by the younger brother during night.
2. The cow's frontside to be shared by the elder brother and the hind side to be shared of the younger brother.
3. The cocoanut tree's bottom side to be shared by the elder brother, & the top side to be shared by the younger brother.

Following the terms & conditions, the elder brother goes on drying the quilt on the fences, watering & manuring the cocoanut tree and tending the cow. The summer and the rainy season passed thus. During the winter season, the cow started giving milk and the tree started giving fruits. The elder brother went on drying and tending and watering, while the younger brother

went on using the quilt at night, drinking the cow's milk and enjoying the tasty green cocoanuts all alone.

The elder brother, thus deprived days after days, had a grinding sense of being exploited & harassed. The younger brother made use of everything : All is grist that comes to his mill ! The younger brother remains cheerful and buoyant.

Drudged at the work, the elder brother one spring morning left home silently. He walked & walked without any destination. He grew tired and hungry. There was a big banyan tree on the bank of a river. In the shade of it, a group of village women were busy to worship a folk-deity. The elder brother sat there; the woman gave him water and fruits. The woman returned home; but the elder brother lay asleep.

It was afternoon. One middle-aged person was passing by the side of the tree. He saw the disappointed elder brother in shabby dress. It was an awkward scene to see an unknown young man lying asleep in front of a temple. He watched the scene. A gentle melancholy possessed him. Hearing the murmuring of the person, the elder brother awaked and fell at the feet of the middle-aged man. The middle-aged man consoled him and asked his whereabouts. While listening, the sad memory of his own past touched the man. Hearing his grievances, the middle-aged man said:

1. Since you have the right over the quilt during the day, you soak it in water before sunset and make it wet;
2. Since you have the right over the frontside of the cow, you reduce the quantity of fodder, and at the time of milching, go on beating the head of the cow;
3. Since you have the right over the lower side of the tree, you stop watering & manuring the tree, cut a little portion of the tree with an axe.

Instead of having been cast down and given way to the inevitable consequence of wrong agreement, he became more self-confident than ever and returned home and followed the advice and got good results.

The younger brother now made a plot to thrust out the elder brother from the paternal house. With a view to drive him out, the plotter enticed the elder brother with a good job in the house of a *zamindar* or a king. The plotter set out in search of job and came back home after a few days with the assurance of a job in a palace. The two brothers reached the royal palace, and the elder brother joined under three conditions : he must collect one basketful of fish daily; he must sit on a seat of four inches & eat on a leaf of three inches; punishment for any outburst of anger must be the mutilation of ear. To abide by the conditions, the new employee had to work a lot with perseverance. To fill the basket, he had to fish till evening without food & rest; to eat on a plate of three inches he had to be extremely cautious, lest one rice should be wasted.

Within a month, the employee became very lean and thin. He was about to die. In the meantime, the younger brother came to see the condition of the elder brother. On the ground of health, the elder brother was released, and the younger brother was appointed. Now the new employee fills the basket with fish, crab, mollusc, snail and moss. Sitting on the thin seat, he goes on eating voraciously without saying 'no'. It created a dormant sensation in the palace and a haunting thought in the king's mind.

One day the king visited the house of his father-in-law. The new employee accompanied as attendant. The king expected fish & meat curry for himself, and a vegetarian dish for the attendant. But the attendant conveyed a quite opposite instruction to the cook. When a vegetarian dish was distributed, the king became mentally wounded. For the sake of courtesy, the king ate it along with *kheshari dal*. At midnight, the rumbling of bowels worried the king. Hurriedly the king excreted in an earthen jar. Next day at dawn the attendant was to throw away the spoiled jar. But the attendant pretended to be sick. He did not keep his word.

As the morning drew on, a different mood seemed to come over the mind of the king. The fear of shame took possession of him. From time to time he was watching the movements of the relatives. But the cunning attendant was intentionally making delay and at last said : *Maharaj!* I shall keep the relatives busy in gossiping. You take its advantage and go for bathing with the spoiled jar.

The king set out alone with the jar. The cunning fellow whispered to the relatives : The last night's vegetarian diet has very much displeased the king. So the king is going to commit suicide by drowning in the water. To save the life of the king, it is essential to silently follow the king and break the jar.

Immediately one relative ran with a stick in hand and broke the earthen jar. The king bathed and left. The cunning fellow fled; devouring very rich diet, he suffered from bowel complaints. The *Ayurvedic vaidya* prescribed the pure water of green cocoanut. The notorious fellow climbed the cocoanut tree of his paternal garden house, and slipped sprawligly from the top of the tree. The simple-hearted brother nursed him three days, but could not save. He breathed his last.

56. The mother's curse

There was once a farmer who lived with his wife and son in a certain village. The poor family had a small plot of land which was utterly insufficient. The farmer used to go to his field to plough and his wife would cook rice and then take it to him. The farmer had to work in other's field as daily or monthly labourer also.

One day during the rainy season (July-August) the farmer went to a nearby stream and marshes for catching fish. It was evening. The farmer went alone with net and basket, but without any lamp. A poisonous snake bit him. He died on the spot. When the usual time of returning had passed, the wife became very worried. She expressed her anxiety to the neighbours. The neighbours set out with lamp and stick in hand and found his deadbody and

carried it on their shoulders for funeral rites. Great was the grief of the wife.

Now, began a life of terrible hardship. The widow had to do household chores in the houses of the neighbours for a nominal monthly salary. She had no time to stand & stare. With a heavy heart, she had to move from house to house to do cleaning, washing, cooking, fetching water, husking, winnowing, driving the bullocks & cows round and round for threshing grain. She was reduced to a charwoman. It must not be thought that she was without danger. She tried to protect herself against those difficulties. She had, however, a few genuine sympathisers. The local land-lord was one of them. When her only son attained the age of about eight years, the local land-lord employed him to graze the goats, and after a few years to graze the cattle, and offered him food and clothe for the whole year.

Thus she had to labour hard for about a decade. Her life was precious for the child; she had it for the child. When the son became adult, she got relief for a short time. Now the boy was an adult, capable of doing heavy work and earning a reasonable amount.

The mother planned to arrange the marriage of the dear son. She expressed her desire to the neighbours and relatives. As the family was well-known in the village, information of prospective brides came from several quarters. After making necessary consultations with the relatives and well-wishers, a bride was selected, and the marriage was duly solemnised in the house of the bride's father. On the fourth day, the bridegroom and the bride came home and the mother arranged a befitting reception in which all the villagers participated and enjoyed a good feast.

Time passed on. The mother had a great expectation from the son and the daughter-in-law. After a long winter, she hoped of the spring. But alas! after about a year the relation between the mother and the daughter-in-law

became bitter. The bride went to her parental house and spoke ill against the widow. The bride's mother resorted to witchcraft & sorcery to separate and alienate the son from the mother. It had its evil influence. It estranged the son from the mother. The alienation had become so open and acrimonious that the son started reviling the mother. Now the mother was supposed to be a liability, an eyesore, a witch. Such was the intoxication of youthful conjugal life and the impact of the black magic!

The tragedy was heading towards the climax. In the wilderness and marsh of Tripura lurked the fatal malaria. It was a rainy season. The mother was lying in a corner without a mosquito-curtain. She had been suffering from malarial fever. She was in need of medicine, proper diet, and sympathy. She sought a quilt from the bride. The bride fell back & spoke with her husband in a low voice. He appeared disgustingly and reviled the ailing mother. In a moment of fury, the son kicked & spurned his mother out. The couple retired to their bed.

It was raining. The poor mother became draggled. She was weeping and wailing. The disillusioned and deserted mother uttered at last a few words of curse : Son! I curse you : in your next life you will be reborn as an earthworm; you will wriggle; you will be draggled; and people and animals will tread you.

The mother died then and there. Numerous flies & mosquitoes were hovering over the deadbody. For this crime, the earthworm cannot walk; it wriggles; and it is trodden by animals & human beings.

57. Worthy advice

In a certain village lived a peasant. He was a man of great perseverance. He had sufficient landed property. He had a son. The boy, in his childhood, was not brought up strictly. The peasant was very fond of the son. The child too often would put his small & soft arms around the knees of the parents. The boy showed great fondness for domestic animals & birds and devoted much time in games and sports.

The peasant suddenly fell ill. His condition deteriorated daily. He was surrounded by relatives, neighbours and attendants. In presence of them, the ailing father said to his son : I am leaving for you enough of property, so that you can eat fish with every morsel of food.

The unwise orphan was overcareful to obey the last words of his father. Every day he used to eat rice with the curry of *Ruhu* fish; it was a costly dish indeed. Still he continued it days after days, months after months, lest it should violate the advice of his father. But since he was not diligent and painstaking, his financial condition declined rapidly. He had no other source of income. He had to sell patrimony every year. He sold out all the paddy fields; only the homestead was left, and a cash of three hundred rupees.

The poverty-stricken young man was unhappy; he was leading a life of misery. He saw darkness all around. He saw no other way out, but to leave home for the unknown. He set out one day with three hundred rupees. He begged for food; saved his last capital; he did not spend even one paise. He walked alone with his anxiety & inner storms.

He travelled, travelled for three days. At night he stayed in open meadows. He became tired. One day in the afternoon he came to see a big banyan tree; near it a group of village boys sat around an old man. He fell at the old man's feet and wept. He addressed the old man as grandfather. The grandfather consoled him and enquired about his whereabouts. He narrated the history of his family. After sympathetically listening to his history, the old may did not disappoint him.

The old man said : I may give you three counsels; each counsel will cost one lakh of rupees; but because you are very poor, you are to pay at a rate of one hundred rupees. The young men agreed. Then the old man said : Do not disclose the fault of others. If you hear a chorus

of devotional song, attend it. If anybody affectionately offers food, eat it.

The young man paid the fees and moved ahead. He reached near the capital of the country. The royal palace was not far away. He met a kindhearted man. The generous man led the young man to the royal palace. The king, out of sympathy, offered him shelter in the royal garden. Meanwhile, the king's spy verified the statement of the young man and found it true. The young man too, out of his own initiative, started nursing the garden. The king expressed his desire to his minister to employ the young man. Accordingly, the first employment was in the garden itself. Here he was found dutiful. He was next transferred to the royal kitchen; his duty was to purchase vegetables and grocery. Here too he was found honest. He was again given a more important job; he was to carry cash box from the treasury to the royal court. In this vital job also he gave proof of his fidelity.

One day the king was in urgent need of money. The young man had to go to the treasury very early in the morning. While coming from the treasury to the court, he saw, in the gray light of dawn, two young persons, one young man & one young woman, lay together in sweet sound sleep till morning. They were in the prime of youth. It was too exciting to stand and stare at them. Who were they? They were the king's daughter and the minister's son. It was a clandestine affair without any approval from their parents. It was indeed a headache to the parents. The young man placed a blanket over them; he did not divulge it.

But the two young persons suspected the young man of divulging the affair. Time passed. All sorts of rumour were in the air. But the young man did never utter a single word about it. Still he was going to be the scapegoat. The duo made a conspiracy to assassinate the innocent young man; they told the royal physician : The princess would pretend to be seriously ill: the only remedy of the

rare disease would be a medicine to be made out of human flesh. Agreeably, the princess fell ill; the physician and the king came to see her. The physician prescribed the rare medicine. The king fell in a dilemma. The physician indicated the name of the young man. After a serious qualm of conscience, the king agreed.

The workshop for preparing the *Ayurvedic* medicines was located at a little distance. The preparatory arrangements were made; fire was lit, a big pan full of oil was placed on the fireplace. The makers were confidently directed to boil any person who would come there on a particular date & time. With a clear calculation the young man was sent there. But on the way there was a temple; devotional song was being sung then & there; the young man went inside the temple and got absorbed. Meanwhile the cunning princess, out of curiosity, visited the workshop. The makers immediately caught her and boiled her. After a few hours the young man visited the workshop and informed the king about the on-going progress. The king became astonished and rushed to the spot, but alas!

Now the king himself became angry and revengeful. He alone decided to assassinate the young man. The king wrote a confidential note; the note had the direction to the executor to kill the bearer of the note. The young man was directed to carry the sealed letter. On the way, there was the house of the minister. The minister saw him and told him to take food. Lest it should be late, the young man told about the letter. The minister directed his son to carry the letter. The executor got the confidential letter and put the minister's son to death.

After about two hours the young man returned and reported. The king became astonished and informed the minister. The minister rushed to the spot, but alas!

Next day, the king and the ministers sat in the court and asked him several questions. Being quite innocent, he was not afraid. The young man gave an account of the

history of his family, & narrated the significant advice of the old man and recapitulated the incident of the palace. The generous king released him from the burden of false accusation and gave him money. He returned home & purchased lands to lead a happy life.

58. Two grave-diggers

In a certain village lived a poor peasant family. The peasant had his wife and five daughters and only one son. The son was the youngest of all children.

The peasant was poor, but honest and laborious. His wife was cooperative, considerate, frugal and sober. The two young persons made a good match. She looked after the family as well as the field; within a decade the family became prosperous. The couple were happy with their lands, children and cattle.

Time passed quickly. The daughters grew to girlhood. The parents arranged their marriage one after another. The daughters had gone to distant villages with their husbands; and presently the son was with the parents. The house, once humming with life, looked deserted, forlorn and empty.

The rural life follows the traditional routines. The sound of birds awakens the peasants at dawn. The peasants, the fishermen, the smiths, the barbers, the woodcutters, the cowherds go out in the morning. They go to weekly markets in the evening. They gossip, smoke, chew betel leaf, and occasionally sing devotional songs, and take care of each other. In such evening gatherings, the neighbours used to tell the peasant to arrange the marriage of the son. The peasant too used to request them to bring information about a prospective daughter-in-law. The local *ghatak* (=match-maker) had a fair knowledge about the marriageable boys and girls of a few villages. Thus on an auspicious day in the month of *Agrahayana* (November-December) the boy's marriage was arranged with a charming, smart daughter of a very rich peasant.

The behaviour of the new daughter-in-law was initially and apparently good. She knew courtly manners; she was sweet-tongued. The neighbours used to comment : 'The daughter-in-law is very good. She has a smiling face. She has amiable behaviour'. Within a few years she gave birth to a son. It had added to her prestige and position.

Now, her real face came to the notice of the old parents-in-law. She was least interested in the economic activities of the family. Her own contribution was very little to the upkeep of the home. She was found extravagant and wasteful. She would treat the hired domestics carelessly, and the parents-in-law artificially. The sign of her zodiac had been such that she could not live without hatred & jealousy.

Crushed by his disillusionment, the heart-broken old peasant became almost a recluse. The neighbours in whom the old peasant and his wife had confided, began to wonder. Quickly the truth went round the neighbourhood. The neighbours uttered comforting words to console the peasant, but they had double-face, despising the young lady secretly & praising her publicly. The peasant was willing either to live elsewhere or to cook separately. The selection of the bride was a terrible mistake!

The daughter-in-law detested her parents-in-law from the core of her heart. She seized every chance to poison the mind of her husband against the parents-in-law. Oft-repeated manoeuver, skilful & clever handling of domestic politics created a very bad impression in the mind of her husband against the parents-in-law. He heard her uttering words of hatred, which had echoed and echoed in his imagination. Now the son cannot tolerate his parents. There was a certain repellent slyness in his behaviour which, though unobserved by others was noticeable to the old parents.

With the birth of a grandson to this family, the breach

between the old peasant and the son was partially repaired. The grandfather had great love and affection for the grandson. The grandson was a frequent visitor to the room of the old couple. The grandfather and the grandmother used to teach him good lessons and memorable stories; and occasional presents and nursing during any illness by the old grandparents went a long way in the tender mind of the child.

The old peasant's son did not at first wish to take any fatal step against his parents; but he was over-persuaded by his wife. One night the young wife and her husband decided that, on the pretext of visiting a shrine, the old couple would be taken to a deep forest for throwing them in a deep pit. The boy lay in the same bed; he overheard the conversation with silent gravity; but did not disclose it; he went on thinking alone.

One day in the morning a bullock-cart was taken; and they started for the pilgrimage. The old parents, their son and the grandson were the pilgrims. The grandson's mother & father persuaded the boy to refrain from going there. But cool & resolute, he resolved to go. On the pretext of repairing the village path, digging instruments were taken in the cart.

They travelled a long distance, left behind all hamlets and reached near a deep forest. The tired bulls required rest. The son left the passengers and went alone with the digging instruments and hastily started digging. The grandson followed and started digging another pit; being asked, the precocious boy replied : Our purpose is identical You are digging to bury your parents. I am digging to bury my father! Hearing the reply, the first grave-digger was thunderstruck. The henpecked husband realised his folly, rushed to the cart and fell on the feet of the parents and disclosed the mean strategy of the heinous crime. They turned back.

In the meantime, the house had assumed a festive look. The notorious lady was almost sure of the execution

of the plot which had ripened in her brain. She was in happy mood. The visit of her parents that very day added to her joy. Delicious dishes were prepared for the guests.

The pilgrims returned at night. The return of all the pilgrims was very shocking to the lady and her parents; The lady backed her mother into a corner and whispered.

The repellent slyness again caught hold of her. She concealed her feelings. She made a mockery of good behaviour and offered them food, and arranged two separate beds in one room for the two pairs of old couples.

The hour of midnight drew near. The repentant son now saw a chance of turning this event to his side. The repentant son and his son very carefully & silently changed the cot of the two pairs of old couples.

At dead of night a new devil rose within her. She frowned & scorned him for his utter failure to commit patricide. Raging, she went to that room and forced her husband to carry off the parents-in-law and threw into the deep water of an adjacent river. It was a time of pitchy darkness of the night. The two packed up the 'old parents-in-law' and hastily threw them away.

The amoral & audacious lady became buoyant of executing such a serious plot. She derided at her husband for his timidity. Now she had a great sense of relief. She had resolved to do it, let the cost be what it might! She got awake late in the following morning and found her parents-in-law alive, and her own parents vanished! She burst out into weeping, slammed and beat her own forehead! Diamond cuts diamond!

59. The Candle burned at both ends

Maharaj Dhanya Manikya was a very powerful king of Tripura. He was a king of superb ability & ambition. He ruled strictly & justly. The victories laid the north & south, the east & west of the empire at his feet. The entire Meghna Valley and the hills of Tripura were brought under one administration. Dhanya Manikya and some of his successors adorned Rangamati (= Udaypur) with tanks & temples.

The empire was unwieldy in size, and the administration was war-oriented. In the west, along the mighty Meghna River, the Tripuri dynasty had sterner work to do. The Tripuri, the Riang, the Jamatia soldiers and the Bengali Laskar soldiers poured out their blood like water in the battle fields to check the aggressors.

Now, one of the servants of *Maharaj* Dhanya Manikya was very active, energetic and eloquent but corrupt. He had the capacity to accomplish a difficult job. Where others had failed, he became successful. His colleagues sensed that there was something wrong with him, yet could not say precisely why they disliked him.

To administer the empire, the king had to maintain a network of espionage. The spies were his eyes & ears. Through them the minister and the king came to know the dishonesty of that particular servant. So, with the consent of the king, the minister transferred the servant to the big agricultural farm of the royal family. The farm was in the fertile valley of the river Gomati. The farm had to supply fresh vegetables to the royal kitchen. Here also he was successful in maintaining a steady supply of fresh vegetables to the royal kitchen. But the clever servant was in search of a clue for extortion. On paper he maintained the number of labourers unchanged; but really, the number was reduced; the wages of a few dismissed labourers went to his pocket.

When the spies had reported the matter to the minister, the minister, with the royal permission, transferred him to a distant office. Now, it was his duty to collect land tax, house tax, cattle tax, etc. from the villagers. Here also he was found very active in collecting taxes from the householders. Through repeated reminders and requests and mild threats, he collected a substantial amount of taxes. And the deposit to the treasury was quite impressive. But here also he found ample scope for extraction in cash & kind. The resentment of the villagers reached the ears of the king.

His next transfer was to a forest office. In the forest office, he had to issue daily or monthly permit to the local woodcutters. By paying a fixed rate of fees, the woodcutters could cut down bamboo, wood, timber, thatching grass, etc. from the royal forest. After working a few months, he got the clue to enrich himself. Receiving the fees and issuing the permit, for collecting a prescribed quantity of forest products, he used to wink them to collect additional quantity of forest products for which they had to pay extra fee. Those fees were not shown in the records.

After about a year, the matter was again reported to the minister. The minister again transferred him to a distant mountainous tract. The culprit soon found out a scope to enrich himself by unfair means.

Disgusted with the dishonest servant, the king disparagingly said : Let him count the number of waves of the river. The minister made order to transfer him to the bank of the mighty river Meghna. He was, as if, ordered to count the number of waves of the water of the river. Practically, it was no duty at all. But the cunning servant was shrewd enough to find out some means of exploitation. He sat in the shade of tree and found boats passing upstream and downstream. For centuries the mighty Meghna River served as the lifeline of Tripura.

Any disturbance in the free passage of the transport system of the river would leave the people in serious troubles.

But the notorious servant used to shout loudly and threateningly to every boatman and said to them : Boatman! stop, stop, the king asked me to count the number of waves of the river, but your passage is disturbing the usual waves and the counting process. So, I will not allow you to pass through.

The harassed and vexed boatmen had no other alternative but to coax the coastalguard and to offer something. He would rave & revile the poor fisherman for something. The live fishes used to flop about in the

boat. He would demand a few live fishes. He became addicted to smoking & drinking.

The king's disparaging comment was caught & capitalised & utilized by the rogue. Thus out of nothing, the coastalguard went on earning something. He was happy. He had no official responsibility. But the news of extraction did not long remain secret. The boatmen stared in surprise at one another and remarked : Our king had become mad, otherwise why he appointed the coastalguard to count the number of waves of the river? The boatmen were engaged in export & import. One important item of import was dry fish (= *sidal sukti*). Big earthen jar-loads of dry fish used to herald their odour in air in advance. It was a popular item of food. The price of fresh fish & dryfish rose. The consumers were dissatisfied with the price rise.

News of the people's discontent was not slow to reach the minister. The minister brought it to the notice of the king. An investigation was made; and an inquiry pointed to the coastalguard as the culprit. He was arrested and remanded to jail.

Thus the servant created problem one after another to the administration. The king gave him scope for rectification. But he remained unchanged. At last the king ordered : Place him on the pointed stakes and kill him. One vice was powerful enough to cut his life short. He had other vices also. The candle burned at both ends!

60. Three blind men's conception of an elephant

Having dislodged *Raja* Lakshman Sen of Bengal in c.1204 A.D., the predatory eyes now turned to Tripura. Tripura was first attacked in 1240 A.D. The Tripuri dynasty was forced to shift from the Barak Valley to the Gomati Valley.

Those were the days of pre-street and pre-motor vehicle system. The people had to walk on foot and carry load on head and shoulder. *Raja* Dangar-pha paid attention to the problem of travel & transport. Tradition has it that

Raja Dangar-pha made attempts to get a wild elephant tamed. During those days Tripura had a large variety of wild flora & fauna. The king's attempt was successful. The king used to travel riding on the elephant. The king had appointed an elephant-driver.

The adventurous attempt of the king attracted the attention of the people of Rangamati, the medieval capital of Tripura, on both sides of the river Gomati. It soon became a common topic of discussion. The king would occasionally come out of the royal residence and make a circuit in the capital riding on the elephant. The king would see a crowd of men, women & children on both sides of the road waving hands & saluting with shy smile.

The news spread far & wide. It assumed the character of rumour. It caught the imagination of numerous people. They used to visit the capital on certain occasions, such as *Durga Puja*, *Nava Varsa*, mainly to see the king riding on an elephant.

Three blind men of a village became eager to see the elephant. They requested their village elder. The village elder engaged an escort. The reliable escort took care to lead the blind men to the capital, and contacted the elephant-driver. The elephant-driver agreed to take them one by one near the elephant. Others were directed to wait at a safe distance. The escort sat with the blind men in the shade of tree. The elephant was restrained with a tether. The driver led one blind man; the first blind man went ahead to lay his hand on one leg of the elephant and returned. Then the second blind man was led; he moved his hand with gentle pressure over one ear of the elephant and returned. At last the third blind man was led; he touched gently the tail of the elephant and returned.

They all thanked the driver for his kind assistance. The blind men were glad. The visitors turned their steps towards their home. On the way they were engaged in lively conversation & jokes. They had a sense of complacence for the successful adventure.

The village elder noticed that there was some excitement among the blind men. They were all in a ferment. The village elder asked : Do you hear? what is this you all got in your head? what are you thinking about the elephant?

The first blind man said : The elephant was like a strong, upright pillar.

The second blind man said : The elephant was like a flat winnowing fan.

The third blind man said : The elephant was like a tall & narrow snake. They accused each other. Each of them was astounded at the gross inaccuracy of the other. Each of them was adamant. Each tried to stick to his own experience. Each denied & turned down the experience of the other.

The village elder said : Listen to me. Each of you had touched three different parts of the body of the elephant. Those three parts alone do not constitute the elephant. The elephant is a very big animal consisting of many other parts. So your conception is full of mistakes. Still you insist on this mistake! Other's mistakes are before your mind, but your own mistake is behind your back!

The village elder did not insist further. As a village elder, as a fatherly figure, he had to choose his words with care. That consideration restrained him to comment: You are both physically & mentally blind!

61. Katal & Kakchand

The legend was one of drought & distress, famine & fever, migration & movement, starvation & suffering, and disease & death. Each person became a thief to his neighbour.

A severe famine broke out in Kashmir in 917-918 A.D. A terrible famine occurred in Kailash-har of northern Tripura about that time. The Kailash-har famine either preceeded or followed the Kashmir famine

No rain fell for two years. The drought caused severe

damage to crops. A large tract of land was left uncultivated. Because of the scarcity of water, cracks appeared in lands. So the famine was caused by failure of the rains and not by high taxes from the side of the kings of Tripura. However, nature's freaks and official indifference on the part of the nascent princely administration of Tripura aggravated the frightful sufferings of the people.

There were two brothers : Katal and Kakchand. Katal was the elder brother, while Kakchand was the younger brother. Right from the childhood the two brothers were active, considerate, & sympathetic. They did never waste time in idle gossiping. There was genuine understanding between the two brothers. In course of time, the two brothers became adult. Through mutual understanding the two brothers took to two separate courses of livelihood. Katal preferred business, while Kakchand chose agriculture. Katal had a substantial amount of money in cash, while Kakchand had barnful of paddy, rice and seeds. The family's financial position considerably improved.

Theirs was a joint family. The parents arranged the marriage of the two adult sons. Things were going well initially. For a few years they led a prosperous, happy life, in Kailash-har, respected by all who knew them. The two young couples became parents with a few children to each of them.

The neighbours knew very little as to what kind of domestic life those couples led during the years of their early married life. Nevertheless, Katal's wife was a little proud of her husband's cash money; she was subtly and cunningly making impression from the force of cash money. An ill-feeling was thus generated between the two wives. Kakchand's wife contrived to find fault with Katal's wife.

At last there came a day when the two brothers had felt that they should live separately. Meanwhile, their

parents had already died. The worldly-wise brothers remained above the disgusting feminine jealousy. They did not allow the malice to spoil the fraternity. Leaving the parental home to the care of the younger brother, the elder brother shifted eastward to a separate plot of land within Kailash-har. The elder brother built his own house and dug a very large tank of similar work; the old tank which had fallen into disrepair, was restored, repaired and enlarged.

It took about a year to settle the familial issues, to build huts & houses, to dug *dighi* (= very large & deep pond) and to perform certain ceremonies. Time passed like the currents of rivers. The next autumn season came. Now, to them appeared the souls of their dead parents in dream and commanded them to journey to Gaya and Prayag for the ceremony of *pinda-dan*, and *ashti-visharjan*. So, the two brothers talked to each other and consulted with their respective families, and journeyed to the holy places in the northern part of Bharat. The holy funeral rite of *pinda-dan* at Gaya and *ashti-visharjan* at Prayag for *mukti* was filling the imagination and stirring the innermost heart of numerous faithful Hindus for centuries. The *Pandas* used to come down to the distant villages to guide the pilgrims. In those days, to complete the tedious journey, the pilgrims had to face many troubles : lack of proper food, sanitation, medicine & vehicle. The excitement used to subside after a few days. They had to walk limpingly & sobbingly along with bleeding feet. Under such circumstances, a heavy loss of life was quite common.

During the absence of the two brothers, a terrible famine broke out. Drought rendered cultivation impossible. Much of land went out of cultivation. Kailash-har and the adjacent countryside became densely covered with dead bodies of men & animals. The parents wanted to sell their children for food, but nobody would buy.

Katal could not foresee, and so he did not make

adequate provision. Kakchand had an adequate stock of foodgrains. Katal's wife had to feed her hungry children. She approached Kakchand's wife and offered to pay any price for foodgrains. Katal's wife went to Kakchand's house a number of times. Kakchand's wife was actuated by a indignation to take revenge against the bragging of Katal's wife. She replied : You have enough money; now eat your money; now eat your money. The next day again Katal's wife took her hungry children there; Kakchand's wife cuffed on the head of the child, and dodged and closed the door. Within a few days, Katal's wife a & his children died together.

After several months of painful, tedious journey, the two exhausted pilgrims turned their steps homeward. On reaching home, Kakchand found his wife & children cheerful, and came to know the news of death of Katal's wife & children. While narrating the news, Kakchand's wife was chuckling and she concluded : I have taught her a lesson for her swaggering.

Kakchand at once rushed towards Katal's house.

The atmosphere of Katal's house was dreadfully still. At the entrance he saw the carcasses of the cattle. He called out. No body replied. No body came forward. He anxiously opened the ajar door and saw the tragic scene of skeletons huddled together. He stood akimbo and then sat aghast. Meanwhile, Kakchand reached there and reported what had happened. Both were silent; each knew the other's agony. Katal took a bag full of money and hastened towards the large pond and plunged himself into the deep water. For a few minutes, Kakchand stood on the bank, tears rolled down his face.

Like a wounded animal, Kakchand rushed headlong from the scene and reached home and gently asked his wife and children to get ready for a cruise. With bags full of rice, Kakchand along with his wife & children embarked on a boat. The boat reached the centre of the large pond. Kakchand then told his wife : You are a

woman of an extremely jealous nature. You are extremely cruel. Your jealousy resulted in the breaking up of our home. Your cruelty is largely responsible for the death of the members of my brother's family. Even a stone would show kindness; but you did not!

Kakchand broke the bottom of the boat with an axe. The boat sank. Amidst heart-rending cries, all the members of Kakchand's family sank down.

Thus a prosperous joint family which once held its head high among the citizens of Kailash-har passed into oblivion.

62. *Raja* Ramgati

Meteoric rise & fall of a Bengali peasant suddenly animated and dazzled the people of southern Tripura. The legend was one of bewilderment and bereavement.

In the southern part of Tripura, certain areas like Belonia, Khandal, Dakshinsik & Tishna were the places of occurrence of the episode. It was in Belonia that the tale began. It happened during the late medieval period. The kings of Tripura were in power.

By the usual corruption of words & names in Bengal, Suramani came to be known as Sura-kana. One of his eyes was injured; he was blind in one eye. Sura-kana's son was Ramgati. Suramani was a hardworking, godfearing, illiterate, poor, Bengali peasant. He was a metayer & a woodcutter. At his middle age, Suramani became physically handicapped.

Thereupon, Ramgati, then aged about fifteen, had to shoulder the burden of the family. Ramgati had to go to the hills of Tripura for gathering firewood, vegetables, thatching grass, bamboo, etc. The distance between his village and the Tulshi Hill of Belonia was not a long one; the distance was only half a day's walk for an active young man. He had to force his way along with difficulty, encountering bog, bushes, creepers, grasses & leeches.

Ramgati was not alone in that hazardous task. Early in the middle of forenoon they used to set out and return

in the afternoon. They used to doze and gossip and sit in the shade of a big banyan tree and smoke and wait for the return of all the woodcutters. They used to sell the forest products in the weekly markets and thus maintain their families and snudge. The hardships dried their faces & deepened their eyes.

One day Ramgati alone halted & dozed peacefully in the shade of the tree. Exhausted, tired & stumbled, he was brooding over his fate & future and in soliloquy called out loudly : Oh my god! when shall I get relief?

And then suddenly came a voice; an oracle was uttered from a mysterious source. The voice was intelligible. The oracle said : Ramgati! your sufferings will come to an end; one day you will be a king.

Ramgati woke up, looked at the sky and boggled. He reflected on the slender chance of getting relief from the drudgery. He came back with the bundles of firewood.

But from that day, he was dreaming of becoming a king. New confidence, new strength, new vigour came into his mind, blood & sinews. The oracle served like a dynamo to animate him; his life became agog with ambition & activity. Casting aside his swaddling-clothes, Ramgati now started using fine clothes. He had two friends, namely Gour Karmakar and Dhaniram Patari. Gour's nick-name was Goura Kamar. Gour & Dhaniram became his righthand men; they gave due publicity. People started honouring him and visiting his house at Kalikapur almost every afternoon and giving him gifts from forest & farm.

The winter had gone and had left behind it a taste of the coming spring season. After about one year, Gour & Dhaniram talked to a priest & an astrologer to fix the date of coronation. The auspicious day of *Maghi Purnima* (January-February) was selected. At a solemn ceremony of *bhajan, pujan, kirtan & bhojan* held at Kalikapur of Belonia, Ramgati was proclaimed *Raja*. The priest, Radhakanta Thakur of Karaliya Tila of Belonia, officiated the ceremony. Ramgati's honourable *Gurudeva* graced the

occasion. Gour was appointed chief minister, and Dhaniram was appointed finance minister.

Now, the *Raja's* preceptor was a *tantrika*. He required a *sakhti* in the form of a feminine energy. While leaving Ramgati's house, the *tantrika guru* demanded one *Sakti* from the disciple to be furnished in future. The *guru-dakshina* was to be paid not now, but after a few years when the *guru* would reappear in disguise. Ramgati, Gour & Dhaniram assured to arrange it. The preceptor left with the assurance.

Things were going well with the new king. The subjects were paying homage to the new king. Gour provided necessary aid & advice. Dhaniram was in search of a young lady for the preceptor. The country-bred *patari* knew the ins & outs of numerous families. He had his informants. After a strenuous search, one girl, named Ayani was found out. Dhaniram went there and successfully convinced her & her parents. Dhaniram came back alone and informed Ramgati & Gour.

A few years after, things took a different turn. The strange thing was that one Khoaj Mullah of Khajuria had a son named Hilal Gazi. Hilal Gazi was physically handicapped. Wearing their traditional dress, he used to visit from door to door for alms. One day Hilal Gazi came to the house of *Raja* Ramgati for begging. Supposing the beggar to be the preceptor of Ramgati, the illiterate & supersitious supporters of Ramgati started to bid Hilal Gazi a princely welcome. They bowed to him touching the ground with the eight parts of their body. Some of them laid their hands upon his feet and passed the hands over their forehead. Hilal Gazi was not prepared for such a reception. He reminded his true identity. But the credulous villagers would not listen to his identity. They offered him dress, food & fruits. Meanwhile, at Dhaniram's suggestion, Ayani was brought from her parental house. In a solemn ceremony, *Raja* Ramgati handed over Ayani to the *guru*.

The week was one of mad recollection, wild & confused. For about one week the ceremony continued. It was a time distraught with anxiety. The *guru* & the *sakti* were adorned like Siva & Durga in the week-long ceremony. There was a coming & going of devotees & messengers.

The news horribly disquieted *Raja* Krishnakisor Manikya of Tripura. The royal police rushed to Belonia and arrested *Raja* Ramgati, Gour, & Dhaniram, & the *Guru* and the *Sakti* and few others, and imprisoned them. Many people immediately fled away.

Nothing happened till weeks later, when Khoaj Mullah successfully convinced the king about the identity of Hilal Gazi and got him released.

The tragedy fell on *Raja* Ramgati like a thunderclap. The hand of the royal police lay tightly on the hand of Ramgati. The fools became the laughing stock of the police: Who the devil made you *Raja*? Your offence was one of treason! Ramgati's legend passed into folk-lore & ballad.

63. Competitive foolishness?

A peasant had his wife and three sons. His landed property was neither too small, nor too big. He arranged the marriage of his sons. The first son had one wife. The second son had two wives. The third son too had two wives. There were grandchildren in the family.

The family became big and unmanageable. The young wives were quarrelling over the housework, and the children were quarrelling over the meals. Trifling issues tended to become major issues. The cold war put psychological pressure on the old peasant. In order to get some peace at home, the old parent separated the three sons and divided the property among the three sons equally. He kept about an acre of land for himself & his wife. After their death, that acre of land would be inherited by that son who had been the greatest fool of them.

Years rolled on. The old parents died leaving the question undecided. For that piece of patrimony, the three sons began to claim superiority over the other in stupidity. They, however, failed to decide such a knotty question. They brought the issue before the notice of the village *panchayet*. The *gaon panchayet* did not decide immediately on their mere assertions, and instead, on a suitable day, sat together to hear their histories.

The first son related his story thus :

One day in the late afternoon I went to the weekly market. It took long time to sell vegetables and to purchase groceries. I came back home late in the dark evening. The children were found asleep. My wife was waiting for me. I was very tired. We ate together and went to the bed together. But the door remained open. I asked my wife to close the door. Without considering my hard labour in the field and tension in the market, she asked me to close the door. We altercated for a while and then fell asleep without closing the door. The burglars easily committed burglary; they decamped with all my valuable things, ornaments, utensils, clothes and cash. Over a trifling task, I became sentimental. The price paid for the negligence was very heavy. I am fool indeed!

The second son told his story thus :

Sir! you know well that I have two wives. One wife is the daughter of rich parents. Another wife is the daughter of poor parents. They have love & affection for me. They daily wash my hands & legs, and prepare food. One of them has a son; and another has no son. It gave rise to ill-feeling; one day it outbursted. The rich wife said : With the utensils & vessels presented by my parents I wash my husband. The poor wife said : Since I could not bring such utensils & vessels as dowry, henceforth I like to carry my husband to the pond and wash him there. The rich wife claimed to wash first. The poor wife claimed to wash first. Both of them were uncompromising. A tug-of-war followed. They pulled my hands & legs. I felt

suddenly on the ground. I tossed, panted and cried out. But they were assiduously dragging me in opposite directions. At the intervention of the neighbours, they fell back. I was the victim of the quarrel of my wives. I am stupid indeed!

The third son recounted his sad experience thus : Sir! you know well that I have two wives. For their maintenance I labour day & night. This is love's labour. I undergo all troubles gladly. But one day I thought of testing their love; so, I pretended to be seriously ill. I lay bedridden. I stopped talking and working. I was struggling with ill-health. Hearing the news, the first wife came hurrying to my side and expressed her own anxiety during my absence. She was deeply concerned about her safety & security. She left. Then came the second wife; she said : If you die now, I will be in the sea of troubles.

The time was December-January. The atmosphere was unbearably cool. I felt the pangs of the winter deep in my flesh. I was affected with fever, bodily heat and shivering. I consoled them and requested them to cure me as early as possible. I like to lie in the warmth of sunshine; so, I told them to carry me to the courtyard for basking. Placing my arms on their shoulders, I hobbled to the courtyard and lay on a sickbed. I was slowly smoking tobacco. Drowsiness came. Setting by my sides, they were talking loudly & hotly. I dissuaded them. But they paid no attention to my illness and advice. They started slamming, beating their foreheads, scuffling, and abusing each other. They dragged me. Meanwhile, the red-hot dottle from the hubble-bubble fell on my head. As I was shaggy-headed, the dottle started burning my hair. But alas! they continued to scream, shriek, scuffle and squabble. However, the neighbours rushed, and rescued me. Pretence would have been very fatal. I am idiot indeed!

The *gaon panchayet* and the villagers sat for a long time to hear attentively, but did not pronounce their

verdict then and there. After a period of pause & ponder, the *gaon panchayet* decided : the property should be equally divided. But dissatisfied with the decision, the fools savagely quarrelled among themselves and perished.

64. The Brahman family

In a certain village lived a Brahman with his wife and a son. The son was endowed with many qualities. The son grew from childhood to boyhood under the loving care of the mother. The meritorious boy honourably passed all the examinations of *Tol* and *Chatushpati*, the ancient *Bharatiya* academies. The young student became proficient in various branches of traditional knowledge. Right from childhood, his father continued to instruct the boy in the rudiments of learning and at the same time to inculcate certain values. He was brought up strictly by his father. The father disciplined the son with a strict hand. Few students had talents like his; but he should be among the fewer who could remain unspoiled.

Entirely different in spirit was the mother; she was an ordinary woman with pride & prejudice, enjoying the moderate material comfort and rejoicing in the son's growing reputation. The son's excellence was the main topic of her conversation. She would often admire him openly. She could not check the temptation. The father too was really affectionate; but he had the capacity of keeping the paternal affection balanced & suppressed in order to have something more from the son. His only worry was that the son should not suffer from complacence. The son should not remain satisfied with the present achievement. He should seek more & more knowledge. But the son seemed scarcely prepared to go that length. Admiration here & there made him buoyant.

The family got on well till the marriage of the son. There lived an affluent Brahman family in another village; the family had a number of sons & daughters; on the basis of a proposal from such a famous family, the father of the brilliant son agreed to arrange the marriage. The

newly-married daughter-in-law was smart, sweet-tongued and charming.

Now, considering the greater responsibility of the son, the conservative & sedate father continued to advise, rule & rectify the son. A few years passed, and with the coming of the daughter-in-law, an alienation between the father & the son was taking place slowly and imperceptively. The daughter-in-law seemed to have started slow-poisoning. The new couple did not comprehend the noble intention of the father. The son was now seen to bandy words with the father. The son was only waiting till the parents should find themselves alone. This he had arranged; he sent his wife to her father's house, and he stealthily kept himself hidden in a very dark corner of the house with a sharp knife in his hand. He had the evil intention of killing his father outright. And while the cold war had been going on, the father remained unaware.

At night, the old parents, finding themselves alone, started their dialogue. The mother accused the father for indulging in abusing & reviling the son. The father accused the mother for indulging in eulogy, and expressed his worry lest the son should suffer from complacence. Reciting a *Chanakya-sloka*, he explained that the indulgent parents and teachers were indirect enemies, while the strict parents & teachers were the real well-wishers.

The son was attentively overhearing the conversation. He had resolved to kill the father, let the cost be what it might. But now he realised his folly. The prick of conscience became acute. What a heinous crime he was going to commit! He sprang up, came out of the dark corner and fell at the feet of the father and confessed to him certain misgivings. He was weeping & weeping.

The father pardoned him; but the son insisted on to pay a heavy price for such an outrage. Nothing but death could wipe out such an attempt at patricide. The next

alternative was to leave the parental home, and to live with the parents-in-law for twelve years.

What a dramatic vicissitude! with a heavy heart & tearful eyes and head cast downward, the boy volunteered to leave the place of his pride to live servile life for twelve years. There he was not allowed to live independently & separately; he was to live with all the members of a big joint family. The mother's eulogy and the wife's abetment drove the brilliant boy to the path of an extreme crime. Now, the nemesis was inevitable. He must meekly digest all sorts of caprices, contempt, criticism, derision, disrespect and neglect.

The young couple went there not as guests, but as criminals to spend a long period of rigorous imprisonment. There they were reduced to drawer of water and hewer of wood. They had to do all sorts of physical labour, without getting any respect & recognition. The relatives were hideously cruel to them.

One day, he was asked to write a *sloka* (= aphorism, verse, etc.). The significant *sloka* was full of instructions : One should shake the seat before sitting; one should avoid the path frequented by ladies; one should avoid the place inhabited by criminals; one should restrain the senses and forgive.

One intelligent merchant purchased the *sloka*. It had important guidelines. He was amply benefitted. The merchant had his merchandise in his boats. He went to a distant land where a gang of dacoits pretended to be generous people and invited the merchant to a feast. The dacoits placed some explosives below the seat meant for the merchant. But the merchant, following the first instruction, shook the seat and the explosive material exploded. So, the instruction saved his life; he immediately left the place and took shelter in the boat. Next, the merchant, in course of his voyage, anchored near a place of matriarchy and magic. It was very difficult for young males to come out of the place. The merchant,

following the second advice, did not go inland. Next, the merchant and his assistants reached a place of cheats. Following the third advice, the merchant left the place. The merchant had left home about twelve years ago. He was longing for homecoming. The merchant returned home. It was midnight. His wife eagerly, silently opened the door. But seeing a youngster in the bed, the merchant was about to kill him. But remembering the fourth advice, the merchant controlled himself and came to know that the youngster had been his son. So, the *sloka* saved the life of the dear son.

In those days, voyage was highly risky. One had to suffer hunger, cold, hardship, misery and mischief. This merchant also faced trouble; but every time his sharp common sense, his acumen and his reliance on the *sloka* saved him. The merchant was not a brilliant student, but he was a practical man. His wife was made of a stern stuff. She did never abet her husband. During his absence, she looked after the entire household admirably.

The return of the merchant from the voyage in distant lands was an occasion of joy to the family and the neighbours. The experience of the voyage became the subject of discussion. The merchant was a modest man, with nothing of the opportunist in his nature. He was frank & free to admit the benefit derived from the *sloka*.

After a few days, the merchant visited the house where the young couple had been working like servants for the last twelve years. The merchant admitted the benefit derived from the *sloka*. The grateful merchant again paid for the *sloka*.

In the meantime, the period of penance came to an end. The young couple, after a lot of sad experiences, turned their steps homeward.

65. A scholar & a boatman

Brahmanbaria is the name of a medieval village on the eastern bank of the mighty river Meghna; the river, originating from the hills of Manipur, flows northward

and then southward and meets the Bay of Bengal near Noakhali. The kings of Tripura patronised the settlement of many Brahmans in this village; hence it came to be known as Brahmanbaria.

It was the month of *Sravana* (= July-August). The rainy season was in its climax. One day, one Brahman scholar received a sad news of death of one of his relatives living in a village on the western bank of the river. So, he had to go there, and small boat was the only means of transport & communication in those days.

Clad in white clothe, the Brahman set out with an umbrella and a small packet of sacred books and reached the river-*ghat*. A boatman was waiting there with his boat for passengers; he offered him a seat in the boat. The Brahman sat comfortably and asked the name of the boatman. The boatman replied : My name is Sumanta. The Brahman remarked : Very good, a good name indeed! Do you know its history?

Sumanta answered : *Guruji!* I do not know. The scholar said : You do not know the meaning & history of your name! Then, you have spoiled the four annas (= the first quarter; about 25 years) of your life. Long, long ago, Sumanta was the charioteer of Ram and Lakshman.

Sumanta asked : *Guruji!* What is inside your packet? The scholar replied : It contains some sacred books. Do you know what is written in these books? The boatman replied : I am illiterate; I do not know. The scholar commented : Then, you have frivolously frittered away eight annas (= the second quarter, about 50 years) of your life. What a waste of your time!

A change came over Sumanta's face. He said : *Guruji!* boating is my hereditary vocation. We are doing it generation after generation. If husking pedal goes to heaven even, it husks. Our family priest advised thus : Trust on god, but keep your powder dry. So, we annually worship the water goddess, Ganga Devi; and carry on this hazardous job.

Sumanta's pole of bamboo (=*Laki*) was beating the water. The boat was moving usually. The waves were marching against the boat; the boat was rushing. A fish leaped out of the water and plunged back into it. The scholar looked above & around. It stirred emotion in his mind. He stood up and stretched his arm toward the horizon.

In north-east India rain often falls heavily; the rainfall of a month (July) is usually more than the rainfall of central India for one year. Nevertheless, suddenly, the hope of the scholar was dumped by a violent gust of wind. A mighty thunder broke the conversation. Then came a squall of lightning, rain, tempest, storm. The waves of the water were splashing the boat violently. The boat was swinging. The terrible wind was shrieking past the ears of the scholar. In such a raging river neither man nor boat could hope to survive.

The scholar's bundle of books did not seem to be of any help; he stared at Sumanta with helplessness. He had read a number of books, but a mere reading of those books did not help him at the critical moment. Quite frightened, he was murmuring & weeping.

But Sumanta was not the man to abandon hope and to surrender. He had faced several critical moments. He asked the scholar : *Guruji!* do you know swimming? If you can get out of the boat, do while there is time.

The scholar replied : I do not know swimming. Sumanta remarked : Then, you are going to spoil the sixteen annas (four quarters) of your life.

Sumanta was an astute boatman. He had a long rope to anchor & fasten the boat. He asked the scholar to hold an end of the rope very carefully. The other end of the rope was in the hand of Sumanta. Soon the boat got capsized. Sumanta swiftly jumped and began swimming very fast. The drowning scholar caught the rope. Sumanta struggled very hard and rescued the scholar.

The scholar appreciated the robust common sense

of Sumanta and blessed him heartily. Sumanta wittily added: I am not the fool you think I am. The scholar walked away slowly towards his destination.

66. Ramkanta *Babu* & his dog

Having tempestuously destroyed the university of Nalanda in 1201 A.D., and devastated the university of Vikramsila in 1203 A.D., Ikhtiyar Uddin Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khilji treacherously usurped the throne of Bengal in *c.* 1204 from *Raja* Lakshman Sen & unleashed the reign of terror.

Raja Lakshman Sen fled and took refuge at Vikrampur of Dacca in eastern Bengal. Streams of Hindus flowed eastward down all the roads leading in that direction. Anga & Vanga & Kalinga relapsed into barbarism; the decadent & demoralised natives had sunk into the depths of ignorance, chaos & confusion. Subsequently, when the fiendish hordes had extended their supremacy up to eastern Bengal, many fugitives concealed themselves in the jungles and crossed the mighty river Meghna to take shelter in the plains of Tripura.

One such fugitive was the ancestor of Ramkanta *Babu*. Ramkanta *Babu's* ancestor was active & energetic. The ancestor's name was Gangaram. Gangaram was god-fearing peasant; he got settled at Vikrampur; he had his wife, and one daughter and one son. The daughter's name was Yamuna; she was a charming girl. The son's name was Kanuram. The alien hordes one day cruelly killed Gangaram & his wife, and kidnapped Yamuna; she became a fanatic renegade. Kanuram, being horrified, fled eastward. Kanuram became orphan. The orphan boy, being tired & hungry, took shelter in the shade of a big banyan tree. Being afraid of the alien tyranny, some families, at that time, turned their steps eastward with the intention of settling in the kingdom of Tripura. Kanuram came to Tripura with such a family and remained with the family for a few years.

The Meghna River was the natural borderline

between eastern Bengal and Tripura. The Meghna Valley was at that time very thinly populated. There were marshes, streams, patches of jungles and wild animals, birds, snakes, mosquitoes, fishes & crabs. In the early & medieval periods, individual men scarcely dared to face those hazards.

Kanuram was now a young man; his body was strong enough to undergo hardship. With the blessing and permission of his guardian, he set up his own hearth & home. In the wilderness, there was scope for reclamation and extension of one's farm. Kanuram took full advantage of the free gift of nature. The kings of Tripura were interested in the land revenue only. The affectionate guardian arranged the marriage of his daughter with Kanuram. Kanuram used to work with knife and hoe, and his wife used to carry away the earth in bamboo-baskets on her head in order to level the uneven land and to raise baulk & ridge. The young couple worked energetically with ambition & hope. The couple were careful to attend to every detail of the domestic issues. Within a few years, Kanuram became a rich landlord. Kanuram had a happy family with his wife and son and landed property. His son's name was Ramgopal. The year Ramgopal had been born, Kanuram started the worship of Durga Devi.

At the time of his death, Kanuram bequeathed to his son a large estate, ponds, domestic animals & birds, and the tradition of the worship of Durga Devi.

Ramgopal maintained the tradition faithfully. He did not add anything new to the estate. He struggled to maintain the tradition. He was wise to consolidate the large estate; he did not take the risk of expansion. He too had a happy family with his devoted wife and son; the son was named Ramkanta. At the time of his death, Ramgopal bequeathed to his son the large estate and the tradition of the worship of Durga Devi.

Ramkanta *Babu* had a watch dog. The dog was

healthy & courageous, running round with curly tail held erect and barking in a terrifying manner at the slightest hint of burglary. In the evening, during the rainy season in particular, the wild jackals used to slink & sneak about the fields & farms for fish, crab & domestic birds, and at times used to yell one after another. The yelling of the jackals would be challenged by the responsibe barking of the village dogs.

Ramkanta *Babu* was moderate in eating & in personal expenditure; but he was liberal in the distribution of bounty to his relatives, neighbours and domestics. His conversation was sprightly. The villagers were happy with his behaviour; they used to wait eagerly for the arrival of the month of the worship of Durga Devi. It was a festival of the village. The villagers used to do all menial work gladly & spontaneously. For three days (seventh, eighth & ninth *tithi*) in the evening a group of young men used to dance, clashing symbols, beating drums and brass metals and holding burning charcoal in an earthen pot. The men, women and children used to swarm in front of the temple. There was a visible atmosphere of goodwill. *Prashad* and food were important parts of the festival. Particularly on the eighth *tithi* the villagers themselves would take rice, pulses, vegetables & spices from the store of Ramkanta *Babu* and cook and eat together at noon.

Ramkanta *Babu's* dog was neither a pet dog nor a guide dog. The dog belonged to the category of guard dog & watchdog. The dog's natural tendency was to guard & protect the owner's property, & to sound the alarm at the approach of strangers. The dog would face a strange dog or any other beast stiffly with tail held erect and with a threatening growling. So, for about five days, Ramkanta *Babu* had to take a precautionary measure; he would tie the dog to a pole at a safe distance with a tether. The dog would snap & snarl. To pacify the dog, Ramkanta *Babu* used to caress the dog from time to time.

The dog was very much devoted to him.

The new arrival into the family of Ramkanta *Babu* was named Ramdulal. The parents and the relatives and the neighbours were quite happy at the birth of the baby. It was impressed upon Ramdulal from his early childhood that he was to have the opportunity of inheriting a large estate. This privilege was always held before him as a great luck. Consequently he had no struggle, no sacrifice, no suffering in his life; he was grown up amidst plenty & pleasures. He was an easygoing and good-natured young man. A quiet, easy life in his native village was his natural element. In bringing up the child, the parents did not accustom Ramdulal to domestic jobs!

Upon the death of Ramkanta *Babu*, the mantle fell on the young shoulders of Ramdulal. The devoted dog was terribly shocked by the death of Ramkanta *Babu*. The dog stopped taking food immediately after the death of Ramkanta *Babu*. The dog died thus.

Ramdulal now took up the work of management. He too wielded influence over his neighbours; he too maintained the tradition of the worship of Durga Devi. But in the absence of the watchdog, he hired a dog from a neighbour and tied the hired dog to a pole with a tether for five days. To him tethering the dog was a part of the festival. Ignorant of the logic, he followed it blindly. He failed to grasp what lay behind the act of tethering; he failed to get at the wisdom of precaution; such a poor quality of reasoning was advantageous to the mischief mongers!

67. Kill the cat in the first night of marriage

There was a rich peasant; he was adventurous, ambitious & a bit arrogant. His wife was beautiful, but a bit indulgent. The family had lands, farms, fields, ponds, cattle & servants. The couple had two twin daughters only. The daughters were brought up in luxury. They used to indulge in rich diet and costly dress. Time rolled on. The daughters attained the age of puberty. They were healthy, wealthy and haughty.

Naturally the parents were thinking about the marriage of their daughters. As they had no son, they expected the prospective grooms to settle in the bride's house. The daughters added one more condition: the grooms must be ready to tolerate a good number of flaps of slipper on their heads daily.

There were youths eager to marry the healthy and beautiful girls. The prospect of inheriting the large property was alluring to them. They were ready to be *gharjamai* (= son-in-law in parent-in-law's house). But the humiliating condition of flapping daily by the bride was a serious & disappointing one. There were *ghataks* (=match-makers) in almost every village. The rich peasant assured the local match-maker a good gift for his service. The match-maker, after his best efforts, convinced two poor youths.

The two poor youths argued to themselves: pain is forgotten where gain follows. We are suffering from starvation; there we shall get all comforts and rich diet. So, what is the harm ? One day, the match-maker along with the two poor youths came to the house of the peasant. The peasant enquired about their whereabouts and reiterated the conditions clearly and directly. The two poor youths agreed to abide by the conditions. The peasant had already made adequate arrangement for the residence of the would-be couples in two separate houses, quite distant from one another. On an auspicious day the two marriage ceremonies were simultaneously solemnised. Immediately after the completion of the rituals, the couples were sent to their respective houses. The submission of the young husbands to their wives was complete; they could not go out. The marriage had made them members of a community in which they were treated like aliens.

After a few months, the two brothers met on the way. One brother was found miserable with baldness on his head. The other brother was found cheerful with

dark hair and healthy body. The baldheaded brother wanted to know the mystery of his brother's cheerfulness. The cheerful brother said : In the very night of marriage, arrangement was made at the floor of the house for offering the first food & clothe to me ; at that time one hungry pet cat slipped round me. The cat was mewing with an intention to sneak fish from my dish. I instantly & forcefully struck the cat's head. The cat fell unconscious and died. Deeply terrified, the new bride never dared to flap. The foppish & drab bride changed her tune and said : I am the half of yourself.

Knowing the secret of the cheerful brother's happiness, the sorrowful brother returned home with a determination to imitate the brother. The sullen young man became serious. In the evening he sat at the floor of the dining-room to take his meal. As usual, one pet cat slipped round him. Instantly he whammed the pet. The cat died. His wife was there. She at once sprang to her feet and wrathfully grimaced. She disparagingly and angrily said : You, poor fellow ! have you forgotten the condition of marriage? What prompted you to kill my pet cat? Henceforth, I will teach a good lesson with one hundred strokes daily.

In an agony of repentance & fear, the tactless brother left the dining-room without taking food and threw himself on the bed. But the bold bride took her full meal. She came with a slipper and taught him a good lesson with one hundred strokes. Since that night, she beat him black & blue. She was a rigorous taskmistress! a formidable force!

The imprudent brother killed the cat too late. It was too late indeed! So, he was destined to suffer and perish in the quagmire. The younger brother was naturally anxious about the health of the elder brother. After a few years the younger brother managed to meet the feeble-minded elder brother and found him almost completely shattered and commented : *Dada,* you have

irrecoverably lost the first chance in the first night of marriage. As time went on, the elder brother's position grew more and more difficult & distressful. The surrender of liberty for luxury is ruinous.

68. He bites the hand that feeds him

Rambali was born in a peasant family. He was likely to have a sense of a little of buoyant feeling, because of his moderate income from two sources : landed property, and service under the Tripura *Raj*.

Rambali was by profession a *Muhuri*, by conviction an idealist honest man and by temperament tactless egoist. He was neither tall nor short. He was a man of some capacity. Anybody who had gone to him for help got it.

One day a young man named Rajkumar came from a distant village. His identity was obscure. His parentage was unknown. He approached Rambali for help. Rambali smiled at him and directed him to sit on a bench. He talked to him and asked him to come again after two days. The young man retired to the house of his distant relative.

It was a fateful evening. Rambali & his younger brother sat for the supper. The meal was served. Meanwhile, Rambali said : A young boy sought our help; I like to donate a few acres of land; what is your opinion?

The younger brother looked thoughtful first and afterward said : The young boy seems to be active but wicked; we should think twice in this respect. Rambali blurted out to the brother : You are narrow-minded and selfish. Rambali suddenly stood up, threw away the dish of food, spurned his wooden seat and left the kitchen room without eating food. The kick split the wooden seat into two parts. The rice & curry lay strewn. That night other members of the family were not in a position to take their food. Rambali blustered; the brother murmured & the ladies whispered. All went to bed.

The next day Rambali verbally donated about five acres of land to the young boy. And the following day

Rambali took him to the eastern hills; introduced him with the village chief of the hills people and requested the chief to sell all cotton to Rajkumar for his business. The young boy soon earned a lot from the business. He built his hut; purchased a pair of bullocks and started cultivation. Within a year or two he purchased fertile lands and married.

But the young man turned out very mischievous at first imperceptibly, but as the years rolled on, more daringly. He took part in plots & intrigues against his benefactor. The abominable atmosphere of conspiracy that Rajkumar introduced brought in sycophancy & cliquishness. Rajkumar said to himself : I must secure alliance with this clan. The younger brother of Rambali had a daughter; the intriguer arranged the marriage of the daughter with one of his own kinsman. As the years rolled on, the intriguer became the father of a son and a daughter. The plotter arranged the marriage of his daughter with a sycophant belonging to the clan of Rambali. Thus the plotter tightened his own hands, and strengthened his grip against the idealist donor. Behind his eagerness to pursue the cotton business vigorously, to purchase additional lands quickly, to buy a pair of healthy bullocks visibly, to build a comfortable house distinctly & to marry early lay his impatience to spoil the reputation of Rambali, to emulate & outshine Rambali.

Earlier, Rambali had established a *Pathsala-* (= a village school) on his own plot of land at the eastern shore of his frontal tank of water. It became very popular. To disgrace Rambali, the intriguer made plots and got the school shifted at a place near the house of his son-in-law.

Rambali next proceeded to establish another school in hill Tripura. To check the recurrence of raids from the eastern hills, the British government took an effective step by way of demarcating the boundary line in 1854.

Now, Rambali established his second school in hill Tripura, about two miles eastward from his house.

Rambali had three daughters. And one of the daughters, Basanti, became widow. She lost her husband and sons; they died of cholera; creeping into a palanquin, she had gone to her father-in-law's house with hope. Basanti came back on foot to her father's house with despair. Possessed of inordinate greed, the intriguer had an eye on the property of Rambali who had no male successor up till now. The absence of a male heir cast a dark shadow over the mind of Rambali. During the dewy season, Rambali made his last & successful attempt for a son. Rambali & his wife started on the adventurous journey, which after terrible hardship led them to the famous temple of Kali Devi in Calcutta. They bowed down and lay prostrate in humble reverence & prayer. They continued in that position for three days & nights; on the third day the priest offered them two red flowers (= *Jaba*) and blessed them. His wife swallowed the flowers. They came back home. In course of time two sons were born : Sures & Mahes. The news of birth of the two sons was shocking to the intriguers. It frustrated their plot of grabing the property of Rambali.

For a time Rambali saw happy days. But tragedy was in the air. He was extremely worried about the future of his daughter & sons. The problem of their security used to worry him day & night. So seriously did his mental health suffer from the plots & intrigues that Rambali, fearing that his children would be suborned to death, himself became a victim of heart disease. Worse was to follow speedily. In October he performed the traditional worship of Durga Devi. The next day he cut dry bamboo & wood and said : 'If I suddenly die, you will be in great trouble.' He realised that his sun was setting fast. On the third day he died. Rambali, who had not injured anybody during the course of his life of 62 years, passed away silently.

Now, the responsibility of performing the cremation, observing the mourning, accomplishing the funeral rites, looking after the young brothers and managing the estates fell upon the young shoulders of Basanti. She arranged a meeting of the village elders & priests. They decided to accomplish the rite solemnly & simply, and to entertain the kinsmen & near relatives only. Day after day went by. On the 13th day the rite & feast were arranged. It was now noon. Streams of people, in hundreds & thousands, were found coming. The bereaved family did not invite them. Still the people were coming & coming. It was beyond the imagination & arrangement of the family! On being politely asked, they reported that Rajkumar had invited them on behalf of the bereaved family. Rajkumar was not at all authorised to invite. It was utterly beyond the capacity of the bereaved family to entertain them. But following the prevailing social custom, arrangement was made; as many as sixty two *chullah* were made and the invitees were humbly requested to prepare their food. Only one family of the kinsmen came forward and offered additional quantity of rice, vegetables & pulses to meet the emergency. It was the family of Bhagavatiprasad.

What was more shocking was that while the *Sraddha* ceremony had been going on, Rajkumar appeared upon the scene and directed Basanti to bring out stashed money. Basanti said : There is no hidden treasure. Rambali's monthly salary was of one figure only.

Rajkumar became furious; he came with hoe, spud & chopper; he crushed & pulled down the fence of bamboo & timber-work of the hut, and started digging the floor with spud & hoe. It was a fearful spectacle, a panic! Disorder in the house : floor dug, earthenware smashed, bedding thrown down, wooden seats overset; fence wrecked, utensils scattered about, roof twitched, etc. spoke of the terrible audacity of Rajkumar, and utter helplessness of the bereaved family and lack of solidarity

of the clan. The spectators were stunned at the devastation. "Hearing this, the world keeps mum, like picture dumb." During the heinous operation, Rajkumar's battle-cry was : 'Basanti! unearth money', 'Basanti! unearth money'. He used to repeat the battle-shout with every strike, with every swoop, with every kick. Rajkumar found no money, as there had been no hidden treasure. Rajkumar strutted out of the house. Tears rolled down through the wrinkled face of Rambali's widow. The members of Rajkumar's family chuckled!

While Rajkumar had epitomized perfidy and ingratitude, his son Kaliprasanna was the perfect example of conspiracy & cruelty. Kaliprasanna had it to say : Barber and washerman should be beaten once a year for getting better service. It was his conviction & practice. The father and the son made considerable inroads into the clan and the village of Rambali. They elicited loyalty. They resorted to the use of terror and a secret service.

The shrewd son went further, and made family-relation with another family of the village. That family had one widow. The widow had no child. Kaliprasanna gave her occasional gifts and addressed her as his adopted daughter. His intention was to utilise the widow as his secret agent against the family of Rambali. The widow's name was Subodhbala. Being persuaded by Kaliprasanna, Subodhbala under the pretension of good-will visit, made a few attempts to drop pellet of poison into the drinking water pot of Rambali's family. She made similar attempt against Bhagavatiprasad, because Bhagavatiprasad had given rice & pulses in October. Her attempts failed because of the cautiousness of the two families. After that, Subodhabala's conscience pricked : 'What would happen to me after my death? What am I doing? This question worried her; she secretly admitted the guilt and disclosed the news of the plot to the families concerned and warned them.

Jealous of the family of Rambali, the plotter went about very cunningly to accomplish his evil design. Kaliprasanna attempted to bribe a sorcerer to kill Basanti, Sures & Mahes through black magic. The local sorcerers disagreed. Then he went to the eastern hills, & bribed a powerful sorcerer. The sorcerer directed him to collect hair, nail, piece of clothe of the target. Kaliprasanna compelled the local washerman & barber to collect those objects. The barber secretly kept the target group informed. It portended something dangerous. Basanti immediately took preventive steps : she secretly invited a local sorcerer, and the sorcerer made talismans for all the members of the family.

Poaching & illegal timber cutting were very common crimes committed by Kaliprasanna. He would some time let his cattle loose at night in the fields of Rambali to devour the young plants. He would secretly throw broken pieces of glass, filth, garbage, litter, wastage, iron, etc. into the fields of Rambali. The cultivation of those lands was highly risky because of that nuisance. The land revenue due to the donated lands had to be paid by Rambali & his children; the lands were only verbally donated; so officially Rambali & his children were responsible to the government for the payment of land revenue.

The spontaneous celebration of games & sports on the occasion of *Chaitra Sankranti* (= middle of April) used to arouse great enthusiasm in the village. The games would be played by boys & young men, while a motley crowd used to enjoy and gossip. On such an occasion, Sures & Mahes participated in one side. Kaliprasanna was in the opposite side; he plotted to swindle and strangulate Sures & Mahes to death. One intelligent neighbour, apprehending the evil motive & impending murder, indicated indirectly to Sures &Mahes; Sures & Mahes immediately withdrew, retired and fled. Henceforth Basanti never allowed her brothers to participate in such games.

The death of Basanti was a great loss to the family. For about four decades she shouldered the risks & responsibility of her father's family. The savage hatred & jealousy of Rajkumar's family against the family of Rambali turned into a menace to the village. Basanti had to bear the brunt of the brutality. Terror paralysed the village life. Everybody used to dread that refugee family. The notorious refugee became the defacto ruler of that village.

Kaliprasanna raised a high & strong embankment across a shallow gorge, obstructing the natural outlet of water, with the evil motive of submerging the crops of Sures & Mahes in the gorge. Mahes was out of the station; the royal administration did not sanction leave; his wife Pritilata arranged a meeting of the village elders and lodged the complaint. They listened to her complaint, shook their heads, chewed betel leaf, emitted tobacco smoke, whined, mumbled, murmured and left. With her usual strength of mind, Pritilata later derisively pointed out the precedents of their cowardly behaviour. After a few months, banks of clouds appeared & heralded lightning, thunderstorms and heavy shower. The gorge looked like a sea. At last, the accumulated water gushed out suddenly and broke the embankment violently & loudly.

Kaliprasanna had one distant relative in the capital of Tripura and he was in the royal service. Being provoked by Kaliprasanna, that very relative destroyed the service records of Mahes and inflicted a heavy damage.

Kaliprasanna's wife was a fraud; she made a number of attempts to cheat the family. She, one day, approached Pritilata & said in a twangy tone : I like to go to my relative's house, but I have no gold ornaments; kindly give your gold ornaments for a week only; I shall return those ornaments after coming back home. Pritilata quickly understood the evil motive & refused to lend her ornaments. Kaliprasanna's son was another swindler; he too attempted to deceive.

The villagers became divided into three groups; one very small group supported Rambali's family; one group incited Rajkumar's family; a large group remained neutral, timid spectators. Misjudgement and misplacement of charity lay at the root of sufferings of Rambali's family!

Some myths & legends of Tripura-land

Several ancient settlements in Tripura had their local myths and legends. Some of these myths and legends became famous, and found place in the royal chronicle of Tripura. Tripura remains an ancient source of mythology. However, many myths and legends have become obscure; some of them have passed into oblivion. An account of a few myths & legends is noted here.

1. Sati's right leg fell in Tripura

Here we have a very ancient myth, known all over Hindusthan. Brahma had several sons; Daksha was one of them. Daksha had several sons and daughters; Sati was one of them. Sati was blossomed into a charming girl; Sati was given to Siva. But the relation ended in tragedy.

The bohemian life of Siva was disgusting to Daksha. Siva had some malevolent demons and spirits and snakes as his associates; Siva had burning *ghats* and dark places as his favourite abodes; Siva had hemp and tobacco and wine as his favourite drinks. Siva was arrogant and unpredictable. Once Prajapati arranged a sacrifice (*Yajna*). Siva and many others were present. When Daksha had entered the place, Siva did not stand up to show respect to Daksha.

Daksha silently decided to take vengeance on Siva. Accordingly, after some time Daksha arranged a big sacrifice and invited many high dignitaries; but he did not invite Sati and Siva. Upon hearing the good news of the magnificent sacrifice, Sati decided to go there uninvited; Siva tried to dissuade her. But the restless daughter went to the careless father's house. Daksha

did not talk to her, and did not even look at her. Sati felt neglected and insulted. Daksha's derogatory remarks about Siva added insult to the injury. Even the invited guests also ridiculed and grimaced and bestowed a contemptuous look on Sati. Sati felt a violent commotion and pain inside. Unable to check her anger and emotion, Sati rushed and jumped into a fire to commit self-immolation. Apprehending the dire consequences of Siva's violent reaction, the invited guests fled away helter-skelter. In the pandemonium the ceremony was utterly disturbed.

Siva came to know of the tragedy. He became very furious. His retinue destroyed everything in the house of Daksha. Not only that, Siva himself came down to the spot of sacrifice and took the dead body of Sati on his shoulders. Siva roamed about in the world and started crying "Sati, Sati". Siva and his retainers started to create havoc in the world. The hermits and the sages became very afraid. The ordinary people and even the animals shivered. Siva carried her deadbody over on his shoulders not without difficulty to himself and to others.

At long last, the gods sought the aid and advice of Vishnu. Vishnu sent his *Sudarsan chakra* to cut the corpse into pieces. Thus various parts of the corpse fell at different places. Altogether fiftyone pieces fell at fiftyone places. In this way every spot became a famous *Pithasthan*.

The right leg of Sati fell in Tripura on the bank of the river Gomati. That very place had become a very popular centre of pilgrimage; it was once the capital of Tripura. The place is now known as Udaypur. It is located about 50 miles to the south of Agartala. The kings of Tripura adorned it with tanks and temples.

2. The killing of Tripurasur

An ancient locality in the Gomati Valley had another remarkable myth. It runs as follows:

Brahma's son was Marichi; Marichi's son was Kasyapa. Daksha's son-in-law was Kasyapa. Aditi and

Diti were Daksha's daughters; Aditi and Diti were Kasyapa's wives. Aditi was mother of some *Devas*; Diti was mother of some demons.

The relation between the two groups of children was not at all satisfactory. In course of time they turned into hostile forces. The *devas* under the leadership of Indra, and the *Ashuras* under the leadership of Tarakashura and Hiranyakasipu, etc. fought on a number of occasions. The churning of the ocean of milk was a famous occasion. The nectar, emerged from the ocean, made the *devas* energetic; the *ashuras* were left enervative.

The *ashuras* did severe penance and received a boon from Brahma. The *ashuras* appraoched Maya to build for them three cities. Maya built Tripura. The *ashuras* renewed their atrocities against the *devas*.

The aggrieved *devas* approached Siva. Siva made elaborate preparations to teach the *ashuras* a lesson. The *devas* approached Viswakarma to construct a chariot and other weapons for Siva. The *devas* supplied all necessary provisions. Siva and his associates settled on the bank of the river Gomati.

Thus equipped, Siva stayed with full preparation. At last, a terrible battle ensued. The leader of the *ashuras*, Tripurashura, was killed on the spot. Along with the leader, thousands of *ashuras* were murdered. The bones of the demons were left scattered here and there. The hills and valleys of Tripura were strewn with *ashurer haddi* (= demons' bones).

A temple was erected on the spot. The spot became a centre of pilgrimage. The kings of Tripura took care to protect and preserve the spot with temples and walls and tanks. The spot, where Sati's right leg fell, lies only a few miles to the south of this spot of *Tripurashura-vadha*.

3. The god's tragic visit to Tripura

Unakoti Parvat is the name of a hill range in the north-east corner of Tripura. In other words, it lies to

the south-west of Assam. A treasure of incalculable value lay there in this very *Unakoti Parvat*. Here we have a very old myth. The myth runs as follows:

Once a group of gods held a discussion. The conversation turned on religion. Are all the people pious enough to perform the rites and rituals? Some people may not have faith or time to observe ceremonies! So a team of gods decided to personally verify the matter. The adventure was got ready. The gods descended at the foot hills of the Himalayas. They had to pass time here in incognito. Here they were, as if, wandering travellers and pilgrims. They were duly received by some sages. They halted and rested there for a few days. The sages offered hospitality and then directed them in their onward journey. In the course of the long journey, numerous deities and their retainers came to join, from sheer love of adventure.

Walking and walking, and crossing many mountain peaks and rivers and valleys, and encountering many wild animals, the deities at long last came to the north-east corner of Tripura. It was a beautiful hill, surrounded by tropical forests. Even only a thousand years ago, the circumstances of Tripura were significantly different from those with which we are familiar in the twentyfirst century.

The gross and materialistic behaviour of the people disappointed the gods; out of despair, some of the gods bemoaned. But what should be the rational solution?

The famous shrines like Gaya, Kasi, Mathura and Vrindaban were very distantly situated! As a sort of solution to the problem, the gods decided to build up another shrine in Tripura. They selected the hill for the construction of the proposed shrine.

One crore gods were expected to assemble on the eighth day of the bright fortnight of *Chaitra* (April-May) at the site of the new shrine. The supreme God cautioned them to complete the work within one night and to leave

the shrine before dawn. In a team-spirit they finished the work; but one god was found missing. Hence the assemblage was one short of a crore; that is, *unakoti*. All the gods were waiting for the missing god to arrive. Besides, they were extremely tired. However, they were supposed to leave before the first caw of a crow. But alas! As fate would have it, a crow cried out, and all the gods were immediately transformed into images of stone. Thus, the adventure ended on an air of urgency and tragedy.

Henceforth, the hill came to be known as *Unakoti Parvat*, and it became a very old shrine to attract pilgrims. Pilgrims visit it once a year on the occasion of *Astami-snan mela* in the month of *Chaitra* (April-May). An obscure legend even connects it with Kapil Muni : Kapil Muni also had practised *tapashya* in this shrine. The sacred hill has two names: *Unakoti Parvat*, and *Raghunandan Parvat*; situated atop the hill, the shrine had picturesque beauty; but the disastrous earthquake of 12 June 1897 utterly ravaged the shrine.

4. Treasure in a pond

Hrishyamukh is the name of a prosperous locality in the south-western corner of Tripura. It consists of a cluster of villages. Most of the residents are of the Bengali Hindu castes. Hrishyamukh lies to the western foothill of the *Tulshi Parvat*, and to the east of the district of Noakhali. Noakhali was within the kingdom of Tripura.

To the western side of Hrishyamukh, there was a rural hamlet. Within that hamlet there was a very ancient pond of considerable size. With its lonely surroundings, big size, high embankments, formidable depth of water, sacrificial wooden post at the centre of the water, and thickly wooded shores, the pond was a geographic nightmare for a solitary traveller. From a tall, thorny date-tree would hang a few nests of the little weaver-birds. From the branches of a tall tree many bats would remain from morning to evening in a hanging

position with heads cast downward. In the evening many foxes would skulk and scream loudly. According to popular belief, a treasure of incalculable value lay there in the pond. Here we have a little-known myth. The myth runs as follows:-

Once upon a time a poor and pious family had an auspicious occasion of worship of a deity. The poor family could not make adequate arrangements. Naturally, the husband and wife were in great tension. At the eleventh hour, the goddess appeared to the wife in the form of an old woman, and sought a handful of rice. The wife gladly offered. The old woman observed the look of tension on her face and wanted to know the cause of her despair. The wife explained. The old woman then said: My daughter! you clean the *ghat* of the pond with broom, water, cowdung; and offer flowers, *tulshi* leaf & lamp there and solicit the number of plates, glass, bowl, jar, etc. from the deity of the pond; and after the completion of the ceremony, clean those utensils and return honestly.

The old woman suddenly vanished; and the wife informed her husband about the advice. It was worth a try. The next day they followed the advice and mysteriously found many utensils of gold. It was a great relief to the family. After the ceremony, they took care to return all the utensils. The invited guests were astonished to see the utensils and plates. Upon an inquiry, they came to know the mystery. Henceforth, it became a relief to the residents of the locality; they too duly worshipped the deity and in return used to get those utensils and to return accordingly.

After many years of happy alliance between the deity and the local devotees, a sad experience happened. One family duly sought utensils and got those utensils. But the greedy housewife stashed one utensil inside a heap of cowdung. The rest of the utensils were returned. Alas! the utensils remained at the *ghat* for three days and three nights. Rumour spread. The goddess appeared to

the housewife in dream and directed her to return the utensil the very next day. Afraid of the dire consequences, she returned it and confessed her guilt.

Henceforth, the deity stopped the practice of lending the precious utensils. Not only that, a great flood overflooded the locality and the pond. The next day the middle portion of the western bank of the pond was found broken. The big cage of utensils left the pond and went to the Bay of Bengal through the passage.

5. The spot where one horse was shot dead by a prince

Ghora-mara chhara is the name of a stream in the western part of Tripura. Flowing from the north-eastern hillocks & valley, the stream meets the river Haora near a locally well-known village named Ranir-bazar.

The stream was named after a sad incident. The legend is quite clear and consistent. It runs as follows:-

Attacks by the enemy aliens kept on rushing the princes and the people of Tripura for centuries. The ruling dynasty had to shift its capital several times. The penultimate shifting was in 1760 A.D. by *Maharaj* Krishna Manikya (1748-1783). The last two capitals were known by the same name, Agartala, or at best old Agartala & new Agartala. In 1838 A.D. a primary begining was made for new Agartala; The princes and the people lived on in old Agartala. The town of old Agartala stood in the east, while the town of new Agartala stood in the west; the distance between the two towns was of a few miles. The tract between the two towns consisted of valleys, paddy fields, river and streams and hamlets.

Maharaj Birchandra Manikya (1862-1896) had several sons and daughters; Radhakisor (1856-1909) and Samarendrakisor (1862-1935) were famous princes of *Maharaj* Birchandra Manikya. Radhakisor and Samarendrakisor were step-brothers. Later, Radhakisor became the next king (1896-1909). *Maharaj* Radhakisor Manikya was habitually charitable, high-minded, moderate and temperate.

Right from his boyhood, Samarendrakisor was given indulgence by his parents (=*Maharaj* Birchandra Manikya and *Rani* Bhanumati Devi). He used to move here and there recklessly. His character was full of contradictions, of good and bad qualities. He wrote excellent books; but selfishness was his ruling passion. He used even black magic against his elder brother, Radhakisor. He plotted to trouble and endanger Radhakisor. He had a terrible streak of cruelty and violence in him.

One day in the morning Samarendrakisor set forth upon his way from old Agartala to new Agartala. The plain land on both sides of the road was rich with crops. The prince rode on his horse. The young prince was strong and stout, bright and beautiful. He was moving faster than a walk, but not so fast as gallop. The dusty road would remain a little busy and crowded with carts, cows, peasants, merchants and the royal servants. But the prince with his horse was a masher. His dazzling dress was his mark of distinction. The people and the peasants used to leave space for the prince. They would shout in his honour. After covering a distance, the prince trotted his horse to a narrow stream. The stream was narrow and shallow. The horse was hesitant to cross the stream by a gallop. The horse baulked. The prince expected the horse to cross the stream through a long jump. The prince whipped the horse. But the horse remained hesitant.

The prince could not control his anger; he dismounted and unsheathed his pistol and promptly shot the horse. The horse lay dying whining with pain and eyes popping. The peasants rushed to the spot, but they had to press their palms across their mouths. They stared. The prince strutted back to old Agartala.

Appendices

1. A note on motif and motif - index

This note portends a problem: the problem of incomplete & inadequate analysis. I could not collect Professor Stith Thompson's complete list of Motif-Index. Professor Stith Thompson's *Motif-Index of Folk-literature* (Helsinki,1932-36) provides a model guideline for motif analysis. I had to depend on Dr. Verrier Elwin's (1902-1964) *Tribal Myths of Orissa*; it contains an incomplete list of mythological motifs. I could not collect Dr. Verrier Elwin's *Myths of Middle India*. So, what follows is an unskilful attempt on the part of a novice!

This collection of folk-tales has two major divisions; one group of tales is related to the culture of the greater Tripuri communities; another group of tales is related to the culture of the Bengali people. A folk-tale is called *Kereng Kathma* by the Tripuri communities. A folk-tale is called *Rupkatha* or *Galpa* by the Bengali people.

The Tripuri communities have preserved much of their ancient culture and possess a great store of folk-lore. Tripura State Tribal Cultural Research Institute has done a commendable service in the collection and compilation and publication of several folk-tales of the Tripuri communities. The Education department of the Government of Tripura also has done a praiseworthy work in the collection and publication of some folk-tales of the Tripuri communities.

High hills, dense forests, springs, rivers, wild animals and birds, a subsistence economy, simple technology, compact village life, bachelors' dormitory, polytheism, magic, witchcraft and sorcery, etc. once used to provide an ideal background for the survival of many myths and tales.

In the Tripuri folk-tales there are stories about animals, plants, family life, love & romance, humour,

jealousy, cruelty, wickedness, foolishness, unusual heroism, magic, chain of events and formula, Cinderella, etc. The stories about the cunningness of fox are almost absent in the Tripuri folk-tales. Significantly another group of tales about the capacity of Muslim *Pirs* and *Fakirs* are absent in the Tripuri folk-tales. Another aspect about the Tripuri folk-tales is that *Chand Sadagar* type of character is conspicuously absent. Not only that, no Tripuri folk-tale begins with the common formula of many Bengali tales : "There was a poor Brahman". But, there are many stories of metamorphosis and some stories of heroism. A myth regarding the nearness of heaven and earth is to be found in Tripura also.

The Tripuri folk-tales have a certain categories of characters. Such as (a) deities, demons, ghosts, fairies; (b) wild & domestic animals, birds, snakes, insects; (c) gatherers, hunters, shifting cultivators, priests, chiefs, kings and adventurers; (d) even local flora.

Some of the Tripuri folk-tales are very buoyant; these stories give the impression that behind them there are reserves of power, the monarchy. Tripuri gods are thought of marrying and having children and forming relations with mortals; this picturesque Tripuri anthropomorphism has partly coloured the Tripuri myths & folk-tales. In this respect, Greek imagination and Tripuri imagination are identical.

As with the tales of all countries, so with the Tripuri folk-tales, the primary aim is to give enjoyment to the hearers, particularly to the children to whose compelling demand 'Please tell us a story' many elders often submit. Besides, folk-tales constitute one of the instruments of social control. How jealousy, cruelty, greediness and selfshness are invariably punished by some mysterious ways is shown through folk-tales; how love and affection, service and sacrifice, courage and wit are rewarded is also exemplified.

Next, to come to the Bengali folk-tales, a few words

have to be added. The Bengali folk-tales also have the primary aim of entertainment, and have the lessons of punishing evil deeds, and rewarding noble deeds. Here it may be relevant to refer to the country tales of Britain; John Wain edited *Selected Stories of Thomas Hardy* (1840-1928), and Macmillan, London, published those stories in 1966. In the introduction, John Wain wrote: "The traditional country tale often deals with high-born people, whose lives were a natural focus of interest to the villagers."

It is well-known that the Bengali society belongs to the traditional four-fold caste structure. And usually, life of the Brahmans was the natural focus of respect and interest. So, the common formula of most of the Bengali folk-tales is to begin with the phrase 'There was a poor Brahman.' Besides, the stories of Chand Sadagar, of trickster Teton (=Tetna, Tedon), of fox, of birds and animals, are common in the Bengali folk-tales. The popular formula tale of the crow has its close parallel in the Assamees also. The Cinderella type of tales are also common in the Bengali tales. It is very significant to point out that an air of helplessness, of surrender and submission, of an appeal for divine redress, is conspicuous in some of the Bengali folk-tales. Bengali gods are thought of as marrying and having children and forming relations with mortals; this picturesque Bengali anthropomorphism has largely coloured the Bengali myths and folk-tales. Bengali anthropomorphism has its parallel in Tripuri anthropomorphism and in Greek anthropomorphism.

The archaic word *Motif* is originally a French term. *Motif* has various shades of meaning, such as motive, a theme, a factor, an element, an emotion, an intention and an indication of behaviour of a person. It influences a person to behave in a particular way. It is a theme in a literary composition. Nevertheless, in the study of folk-tales, the term *Motif* has a wide currency. What follows

is a tentative list of *Motifs* primarily found in the folk-lore of Tripura.

Attendants of the gods
Death of the gods
God of the world of the dead
Goddess of corn
Goddess of wealth
Goddess of smallpox
Goddess of water
Raising the sky
Sun & Moon as husband & wife
Sun & Moon as sister & brothers
Stars as children of Sun & Moon
Causes of eclipses
Origin of stream
Origin of frost
Origin of thunder
Cause of earthquake
Disease caused by ghosts
Disease caused by witchcraft
Origin of particular tribe
Why the squirrel has stripes
Why the monkey has a red bottom
Why the snake has its tongue torn
Creation of plant by transformation
Plants from body of slain person or animal or insect
Wisdom giving animal or bird
Animal helps men to wealth & greatness
Marriage of a girl to a monkey
Marriage of a girl to an elephant
Marriage of a girl to a bull
Marriage of a girl to a snake
Human offspring from marriage to animal
Taboo to face the Sun while urinating
Taboo to eat from hands of menstruous woman
Talking plants, animals & birds
Power of nudity in magic

Future learned through omens
Bodily injury or death through magic
Resuscitation by magic
Malevolent return of the dead
Defence against ghosts or the dead
Ghosts placated by sacrifice
Food placed out for returning souls of dead
Reincarnation in plant or tree growing from grave
Flower from grave
Money-lender reborn as parasite plant to collect money
Gods visit earth
Ladder to upper-world
Pit-entrance to under-world
Remarkable physical organs
Residence in a tree
Residence in a river water
Extraordinary pond
Extraordinary implement
Witches
Ordeals by fire
Suitor test by pre-marital service
Bride test by performance of tasks
Absurd ignorance
Competitive foolishness
Deceptive bargains
Co-wife magically transformed into tortoise
Step-daughter transformed into a bird
Jackal employed to educate baby crocodiles; he eats them instead
Parents trick children into going on a visit & then abandon them in forest
Gods in disguise visit mortals
Crocodile feigns death
Innocent woman accused of being a witch
Victorious younger brother
Orphan hero
Attempt to climb to heaven punished

Prince finds maiden in woods & marries her
Dying father's advice to sons
Treasure discovered through dream
Incident when wife takes food to husband in field
Old man's wisdom
Why Kingfisher can catch fish
Why Banyan tree is immortal
Neglect to worship punished
Incest punished
Debtor punished
Ingratitude punished
Jealousy punished
Punishment: beheading
Rumour-mongering punished
Punishment: beating to death
Punishment: banishment, exile
Curse as punishment
Punishment: abandoning in forest
Humiliating punishment
Why *Durba* grass is trampled!
Why dogs urinate at *Tulshi* leaf!
Why *Lairook* leaf trembles!
Why frog's upper skin is warty & rough!
Why PhalguNadi is dry & dirty!
Why male swan's voice is rough & harsh!
Reincarnation in degraded form as punishment
Henpecked husband
Cruel step-mother
Human sacrifice
Misanthrophy
Abandoned children
Tree aids abandoned children
Self-mutilation
Sacrifice to river
Tragic love
A chain of events

Most of the main *motifs* primarily found in the folk-

lore of Tripura have been noted above. An addition of brief commentary on various *motifs* may be a tedious job. So what follows is a short remark about human sacrifice.

S 260.1 Human sacrifice

The custom of human sacrifice, commonly known as *Nara-bali*, was once a fact, and not a fiction. It is neither a myth nor a legend; it is history. It is part of the history of medieval Tripura. So it deserves an explanation.

Head-hunting was the archaic form of human sacrifice. Head-hunting has been found sporadically all over the globe. So far as the north-eastern part of Bharat is concerned, the ancient greater Assam was well-known for head-hunting. Most of the hill tribes, such as Garo, Khasia, Naga and Kuki, formerly were head-hunters. Head-hunting here was associated with marriage and with the victim's obligation as a servant in the next world....The young girls were instigators of head-hunting and used to refuse to marry young boys who had not yet hunted human heads; (Ref. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. 11, pp. 201-202).

In ancient Tripura there was a cruel king named Tripur. His capital punishment at the hand of Siva was a relief to the people. The queen begged for a son. The posthumous prince Trilochan was a pious king. Trilochan was destined to introduce the worship of 14 gods.

In Tripura, so far as the custom of human sacrifice is concerned, the kernel of the story is like this: fourteen deities, once having been in a precarious situation, and having misused and betrayed the dedicated service of *Rani* Hiravati, the queen of *Raja* Trilochan, and in return for her hospitable reception of them, blessed the queen.

Out of this kernel, the Tripuri dynasty wisely developed a war cult. The peril of attacks and battles was thrust upon Tripura since 1240 A.D. The gods and kings, as if, went together to protect the land and the people from the cruel hands of the foreign invaders. The worship of 14 gods (= *Chaudda Devata*) was made

institutionary; and a similar arrangement was made for Tripureswari Kali Mata. While all Tripura have been continuing for centuries to worship *Chaudda Devata* and references to *Chaudda Devata* are numerous as those of Tripureswari Kali Mata in the chronicles of Tripura, the most famous shrines of *Chaudda Devata* and Tripureswari Kali Mata in Tripura proper are in the Gomati Valley. It must be pointed out that following the damage of the temples of Udaypur in the Gomati Valley by the invaders, the royal family in 1760 shifted the seat of *Chaudda Devata* northward to the Haora Valley at old Agartala.

The names of the *Chaudda Devata* are: Hara, Uma, Hari, Ma, Bani, Kumar, Ganapa, Bidhi, Kha, Abdi, Ganga, Sikhi, Kama & Himadri. The temple of *Chaudda Devata* continues to enjoy the patronage of the royal dynasty of Tripura. The *Chaudda Devata* temple has an elaborate order of priests and attendants; the order is as follows:

Chantai	Chief Priest
Khapang Toinai	Vice Chief
Nârân	Deputy to the Chief Priest
Bâdifâng	Storekeeper and cashier
Yâkchu	One who washes the animals to be sacrificed
Gâlim	One who decapitates the animals
Binandiâ	Watchman
Purohit	One who reads out the *Chandi*
Taluâ	One who prepares the *naivedya*
Mâli	Sweeper
Padrâi	Militaryman of the gods
Oâkmâ	Builder of the temporary shed
Katiâ	One who prepares the meat
Laichikak	One who hoists the flag
Sutradhar	Throne cleaner
Banik	Image checker
Acharya	Image checker

The worship of the deities in the temple is a daily affair. Being a *Sakta* temple, animal sacrifice is a part of

worship. One male goat is sacrificed every day; meat and rice, etc. are offered to the deities at noon. The age-old practice of unrestricted sacrifice of he-goat, buffalo, sheep, tortoise, pigeon, swan, egg and even human being was limited for the first time by *Mahârâj* Dhanya Manikya (c. 1490-1515 A.D.). There were secret agents and spies to find out spotless boys for the sacrifice. The agents were known as *Maichhili*. The victim would be allowed to indulge in all kinds of amusements, food, games, dress. To avert the searching eyes of the spies, parents used to bore a hole in the ear lobes of their boys. *Maharaj* Dhanya Manikya strictly prohibited the practice of sacrificing the innocent boys. With a strong disregard for local belief, the king made the proclamation; it aroused mixed emotion. *Mahârâj* Govinda Manikya (1660-1661; 1667-1672) went a step further and restricted the number of sacrifice of animals also. The worship of the deities reaches its climax during the week-long festival held in the month of *Âshâd* (June-July). The annual festival is called *Khârchi Pujâ*; thousands of pilgrims attend; hundreds of he-goats, and pigeons and eggs are offered. E.A.Gait comments that the Chutiyas used to offer human sacrifices to Kesai Khanti; Gait adds: Humans were also formerly offered by the Tipras, Kacharis, Koches, Jaintias and other Assam tribes. (*A History of Assam;* P. 42).

A subtle process of assemblage of various cults and their gradual attenuation continued in Tripura for a long period of time. Several factors contributed to the attenuation of the practice of human sacrifice and animal sacrifice; these are: statesmanship of a few kings, acculturation, Bhakti movement, British administration's reformative spirit.

At the end of this particular enquiry, a brief remark may be added on a few analogous myths and rites occuring elsewhere. It has to be pointed out that this primary survey did not find any unique motif in the folk-

lore of Tripura. Like the ancient elders of other countries, the ancient elders of Tripura spent a lot of ingenuity at the why of some peculiar features of some flora and fauna, and of some distinct natural phenomena. They spent their imagination in making a punishment fit for a crime, and in making a reward fit for a good deed.

In Greek mythology a monster named Eurynomos with grinning teeth had a liking to devour the flesh of the dead, leaving only their bones; (*A Handbook of Greek Mythology*, P.31). It is not surprising that an almost identical folk-tale occurs in Bengali myth also.

In Tripuri mythology the name of a benevolent god (=Gariâ) occurs very prominently. Garia is highly respected as a divine culture-hero. He has prescribed a philosophy of life based on a synthesis of *Jnan, Karma* and *Bhakti*. In Greek mythology, Prometheus is equally honoured as a divine culture-hero. (*A Handbook of Greek Mythology*, P.54). Both the gods are concerned in the welfare of the human beings.

In Tripuri mythology, the name of a kindhearted goddess (=Larimâ) occurs in connection with the funeral rites. She cooks food in the distant hills and offers food to the deceased; her food makes the deceased people forget their former existence and family-life. It is believed that a big timber (= *Bufang Kebeng*) is set cross-wise to separate the world of the dead from the world of the living. In Greek mythology, a body of water separates the two world, and Lethe's magical drink makes the dead forget his former existence. (*A Handbook of Greek Mythology*, P P. 88-89). ~¡VaUr

In Tripuri mythology the benevolent goddess Khuluma is the patroness of cotton cultivation, o f spinning and weaving. Similarly, in Greek mythology the goddess Athena is the patroness of spinning & weaving. (*A Handbook of Greek Mythology*, P.112).

In Tripuri mythology and in Bengali mythology some

deities are believed to appear to a disciple in the form of an old man or an old woman; the deities appear either in dream or in disguise. In Greek mythology also similar belief is to be found.(*A Handbook of Greek Mythology*, P.112).

The Hindu mythology of Bharat describes at length the battle of the *Devas* and the *Ashuras*. The Greek mythology too contains a similar tale.(*A Handbook of Greek Mythology*, P.117).

In Bengali mythology the cowherds worship a god named Bâghâi to keep the dreaded tigers and wolves away from the cattle. In Greek mythology Apollo is a god worshipped by shepherds for the protection of sheep.(*A Handbook of Greek Mythology*, P.136).

In Hindu mythology of Bharat the name of Biswakarma occurs prominently as a divine architect & smith carpenter. In Greek mythology Hephaistos is worshipped as a divine smith.(*A Handbook of Greek Mythology*, P.165-166).

In Tripuri mythology the names of two malevolent deities (=Burâchâ and Hâichukmâ) occur distinctly. Burâchâ is the husband; while Hâichukmâ is the wife. They are hill-gods. They cause panic and disease, and conceal domestic animals & birds. In Greek mythology, the name of a similar type of god is Pan. (*A Handbook of Greek Mythology*, P.P.167-168).

Coming to Greek mythology, mention may be made of Nymphs; Nymph means 'young marriageable brides'. They are spirits. (*A Handbook of Greek Mythology*, P.P.172-173). Similar belief is to be found among the Tripuris and the Bengalees.

In Greek mythology, the gods are human in form and human in character. They do much as men do, live in houses in heaven, eat food, marry and give birth to children and on occasion quarrel and become jealous and punish.(*A Handbook of Greek Mythology*, P.176). In Tripuri mythology also the character of the gods is

identical. In Bengali mythology also the character of the gods has been depicted similarly.

The jealousy of step-mother against the step-children is a common theme in Tripuri folk-lore, in Bengali folk-lore and in Greek folk-lore. In Greek mythology, the second wife of Athamas was named Ino; Ino hated and plotted against her step-children. (*A Handbook of Greek Mythology*, P.196).

In Greek mythology, Melampus was a notable seer; he received the gift of understanding the speech of beasts and birds, (*A Handbook of Greek Mythology*, P.259). In Bengali folk-lore there was a landlord who had received a similar gift of understanding the dialects of birds and beasts.

The stories of depredations by ghosts, giants, etc. are common in Greek mythology and in Tripuri mythology and in Hindu mythology. In Greek mythology, one boxer named Euthymos, while roaming here & there, came to an affected village and drubbed the ghost effectively, (*A Handbook of Greek Mythology*, P.279). In the *Mahabharat* the legend of Bhim punishing the demon Bak-Rakshash is well-known; Bhim offered to save the affected villagers, but set no condition; the Pandavas took no advantage out of the situation.

A reference to Sir James George Frazer's (1854-1941) famous book *The Golden Bough* may be an aid to focus on some significant practices of Tripura. In certain ancient and medieval kingdoms of Africa the socially approved cruel practice of regicide was prevalent among some warlike people. Infirmity or old age or an end of a fixed term of a king, or some public calamities like drought, famine, epidemic or defeat in battle provided the occasion of the custom of putting kings to death, (*The Golden Bough*, PP.264-283). In some kingdoms of south-east Asia a mild and humane version of the practice of regicide has been noted by Frazer. In Cambodia the king annually abdicated for three days in

the month of February. In Siam a temporary king is appointed for three days in the month of April, (*The Golden Bough*, PP.283-285). In Tripura the famous festival of *Kharchi Puja* is celebrated during the rainy season in *Ashad* (June-July). This festival is followed by a respite of 15 days. After the interval, another famous festival called *Ker Puja* is celebrated. The priests of the *Chaudda Devata* temple officiate here in the *Ker Puja* also. The *Ker Puja* provides a significant occasion to nominally punish the king for his acts of omission and commission. As a token of punishment the chief priest (= *Chantai Maharaj*) imposes a fine of one rupee. The king instantly pays the fine. The king is not asked to abdicate the throne. This is a very mild and soft and humane form of taking the king into account for his negligence of duties.

It may be added that in the hills of Tripura each Tripuri hamlet has a council of elders. The village headman is known as *Kâmi-fâng* or *Chaudhuri*. There is no fixed tenure of office; but an assessment is usually made every year during the month of *Chaitra* (April-May). Here also drought, famine, epidemic, inter-village or intra-village quarrels, etc, provide occasion to ask the headman to step down gently. It is alleged that the benevolent god Garia is displeased with the inept handling of the affairs of the village.

In *The Golden Bough* (PP. 180-188), Frazer graphically described the belief about the absence and recall of the soul. The soul of a sleeper is supposed to wander away from his body and to visit the places, to see the persons and to perform the acts of which he dreams. If the soul is detained, distracted or destroyed, the concerning person must die. Such belief exists among the tribes of Africa, among the Red Indians, among the Karens of Burma and many other people of south-east Asia. Similarly, the Tripuri communities also believe that a sleeper's soul wanders away in the shape of a grasshopper; so they do not hurt a grasshopper, and they do not wake a sleeper.

In modern Greece, when the foundation of a new building is to be laid, it is the custom to kill a cock, or a ram or a lamb, and to let its blood flow on the foundation-stone; (*The Golden Bough*, P. 191). In Tripura similar practice was in vogue among the Tripuri people. When the foundation of a new bridge was being laid, the Bengali contrators used to sacrifice a he-goat.

In Odisha there was a belief: 'The sky was very near the earth'. One day an old woman, at the time of sweeping her court, hit the sky with her broom, and the sky went up; (Elwin: *Tribal Myths of Orrisa*, P. 29). Elwin recorded almost identical belief among some communities of the north-east frontier of India; (Elwin: *Myths of the North-East Frontier of India*, PP. 23-24). The same belief is to be found in Tripura, particularly among the Tripuri communities.

Dr. Praphulladatta Goswami pointed out the existence of the formula tales among some hills people of Assam, (Goswami: *The Folk-tales of Assam*: in Dr. Maheswar Neog: *Pragjyotisa*, P. 68). An interesting feature of the formula tales is that an accident sets moving a chain of accidents. This type of formula tales is to be found among the Tripuri comminities.

The Teton types of tales are also abundant in Tripura. J. Borooah's book *Folk-tales of Assam* (PP. 20-26) contains an interesting story 'The Jungle crow and the Wren'. It has its parallel among the Bengali people of Tripura. My mother Snehalata (1912-1992) narrated it to us. My cousin brother Hemanta's (c.1929-2003) pleasant narration of Teton tales was a delightful occasion to us. These tales centre round a character called *Tetna* or *Teton* or *Tenton*. In the Bengali tales the tricksters possess no values, they are *thugs*, they are deceivers, but they are not debauchees. The Bengali tales and the Assam plains tales are almost identical so far as the character of tricksters is concerned. But the North American Indian tales depict a trickster in a different

way; here the trickster is a creator & destroyer, giver & negator, a benefactor and a buffoon. (Elwin : *Myths of the North-East Frontier of India*, pp. 137-138). The Arunachal Pradesh tales correspond to the North-American type.

It is significant to refer to the story of Bhombaldas. This ancient story, in its simplest outline, runs as follows: Two friends once in a journey found themselves deep in the woods. Night fell. They found a lonely house there. They could not guess that it was the residence of ghosts. The ghosts were then roaming outside at night. The two friends halted inside the house during the absence of the ghosts. Before dawn, the ghosts returned, but failed to go inside. The two friends frightened them away.

Now, in Grimm's *Fairy Tales* there is a similar story : the weak & despised animals frightened away the robbers and lived happily in the snug house in the woods.

In south-east Asia and in Japan also there is a similar story : an egg, a scorpion, a needle, a piece of feces and a rice mortar entered the house of an old woman during her absence, and on returning, the old woman met a series of pre-planned accidents and died there. Among the Riang community of Tripura, there is a similar story : *The hen and the wild cat.*

Among the Indians of the northwest coast of North America the story of *Raven's war on the South wind* is of the same type.

Now, according to A. Arne such stories stand in interdependent relationship in their origins, and their origins may be traced to Bharat. (Hoebel : *Man in the Primitive World*; pp. 474-475).

2. A note on the quality of life :

Folk-lore serves different purposes to different groups of people: enjoyment to the children, romance to the young people, moral lesson to the elders, and reflection on the quality of life to the students of social anthropology. A student of social anthropology should subordinate the narration to the reflection on the character and quality

of life. From the survivals in myths, folk-tales, proverbs, games, popular cults, beliefs, and also from legend and history we can form an idea about the quality of life-patterns which form the hinterland to the folk-lore. In other words, folk-lore may be analysed in terms of the conditions of the ancient & medieval time. Analysis may be carried forward beyond the boundary of written words.

During the medieval period a major part of Bharat was under the despotic rules of several groups of hordes from the Middle East. The basic components of civilised life such as rule of law, constitution, independent judiciary, legislature, public hospitals and secular academy were absent. The foreign hordes, having destroyed the ancient Indian academies, introduced their own religious academies. The local Brahmans sporadically & precariously maintained the traditional system of education through the *Tol* & *Chatuspati* . The two systems of education lived in separate worlds. Between the alien autocrats and the local natives there was an invisible wall. There was no economic dynamism, no social mobility, no political democracy, no stabilising force. The local human energies remained suppressed. There was not an iota of moderation and reasonableness in public administration. The maniacal despots would not take effective steps in case of natural calamities; but many of them would let loose the forces of men-made calamities. There was no secular programme of national educational goals. A nation under such dangerous despots was an awful scene. Few dared think of complete independence from the grip of the despotic alien rule, though there were slow and mild undercurrents of nationalism. In view of the engulfing reign of terror, exploitation & enslavement, the weariness of the local natives to maintain their own religion preoccupied the minds of most of them. The natives underwent the harrowing experience for several centuries. There was chaos & confusion, disorder &

destruction all around in the life of the natives. The natives plunged into ill-health, illiteracy, poverty, superstition and timidity. It utterly depraved them. The quality of life was naive, poor, primitive, shoddy, short and tradition-bound. The intellectual life was paralysed. Political tryanny, economic exploitation, social enslavement & religious persecution racked Bharat & afflicted the natives. Such a sordid life forced their minds towards imaginative conceptualisation for innovating the worship of new gods.

The alien hordes and their leaders and their lords lived in a splendour that many natives could not even imagine. By force & fraud, they moved from rags to riches. They squeezed the sugarcane & left the dry rind.

The foreign hordes kept on rushing even the native kingdoms of the north-eastern corner of Bharat. Tripura felt the onslaught for centuries. The armies of Tripura poured out their blood like water in the battle-fields at the Meghna Valley. The evil influence of the medieval alien rule radiated all over Hindusthan and over greater Bharat. So, one sided idealization of medieval life simply because it has passed away, is unhistorical. For redress, the natives used to appeal to gods, and resorted to rites & rituals and invented many imaginary ritual-tales.

Under such contrasting situation, the qualitative difference between the Tripuri folk-tales and the Bengali folk-tales has to be understood. The Tripuri folk-tales are animated by a spirit of royal majesty, knightly chivalry, pageantry of the medieval battles and vigorousness of independent peasant life of the hills.

Some of the Tripuri tales have dramatic cadence. The formula type of folk-tales afford a fairly interesting insight into the action of the hills people with regard to the punishment of some crimes. These tales represent a chain of actions, as well as a chain of crimes. In these tales, when the ultimate offender had been brought to justice, the chief was obliged to make an inquiry into

the cause & effect, and to examine several offenders one after another, and to punish the original criminal only. That certainty of punishment did a lot in the maintenance of law and order there. In future, any alteration in criminal administration in the direction of making punishment of the original criminal uncertain and political, may result in an increase in crime rate and in degeneracy of social life.

By contrast, the Bengali folk-tales are undermined by a sense of feebleness, helplessness, spinelessness & fatalism. To read the Bengali folk-tales is to apprehend to what a distressful generation the Bengalees belonged during the medieval period. The rational faculty of the common people sunk very low. So, they depended on the plausible stimulus of supernatural blessings. For about a century the distress bitterly rasped their nerves. A relief, a renaissance, a self-confidence started coming to them with the Victorian reformative spirit of the British administration in India and with migration to independent India after 1947. Now a belief in the efficacy of modern science, education and healthcare is reducing their dependence on folk-deities, and loosening the grip of some old rites & rituals.

The Vedic sages invoked : Let noble thoughts come to us from all sides. But unfortunately, many ignoble thoughts have forced their entry here. Those ignoble thoughts have affected the minds of millions of natives. It has manifested itself in a deeply twisted logic devoid of rationality. A misleading, tremendous impact on the native minds remains manipulative. Millions of natives do not even care to know how far and how deep their society has sunk. Even at a sane attempt at arousing conscientious perception towards national problems, many natives get annoyed & displeased. The rottenness is deep-rooted. Rebarbarisation plot also is afoot. If it does not arouse their consciousness, the natives deserve the fate. Millions of natives, when left to themselves,

neither know nor care to know, who massacred whom. And several pseudo-secularists have cunningly distorted the history to whitewash the crimes of the hordes. Many natives purposely & criminally supress conscience.

3. A note on ethnography of Tripura

As a branch of anthropology, ethnology makes a comparative study of races distributed over a wide range of area. As a branch of anthropology, ethnography makes an intensive study of a particular race or a particular group of people. What follows is an ethnographic study of the Tripuri people, and that too about their administrative aspect only.

Socio-economic and political organisation comes into being whenever communities are segmented on some basis. The socio-economic and political organisation may be outlined here, using a few general societal types, such as family, band, lineage, clan, tribe, chiefdom and kingdom. Family is the cradle of civilization : affection, cooperation, procurement of food, shelter and clothing are its primary duties. The next stage is band : in band level all the members are related; kinship is a basic institution; family ties remain in tact. Next group is lineage : a lineage is a group of families descended from a common ancestor about six or seven generations earlier. Next group is clan : a clan is a larger group of families in which the common ancestor dates back more than seven generations; clan members are not permitted to intermarry. A clan is usually served by a headman. He is the focal point of a clan because of his personality, moderation & knowledge. Next group is tribe : a tribe consists of some clans; tribe members are not premitted to marry outside the tribe. A tribe may have part-time priests, messengers, executives. The village council is fully developed at this stage. Next group is chiefdom : in chiefdom some families are more wealthy, prestigious and powerful than others. This society is not egalitarian. A chiefdom possesses part-time executives, priests,

messengers, and other council- members. The chief mediates between the conflicting parties, and organises rites & rituals and ceremonies.

Next stage is kingdom : kingdom possesses a central government and many full-time employees & servants; consolidation of some chiefdoms into a large unit of political organisation produces a kingdom. Kingdom monopolises the right to use force and inflict capital punishment and to levy taxes. Obviously, this society is not egalitarian. Kingship is usually hereditary. Heterogeneity may be another feature of kingdom; it may include families, bands, lineages, clans, tribes & chiefdoms.

This basic anthropological perspective of archaic cultural complexity in general may provide a framework of reference to indicate the level of cultural complexity attained by some of the Tripuri communities. Most of the Tripuri communities consist of certain common levels of cutural complexity such as family, band, lineage, clan & tribe; difference arises beyond these primary levels.

The Dev Barman community (5,43,848 in 2001) represent a very mature and sophisticated level of cultural complexity. They attained the high level of kingdom. Beginning in the distant past as a small band without any stratification, the Tripuri community expanded its support-base, developed kingship, built a kingdom, consolidated military system, worked out a few levels of internal differentiation, reached a point of visible strata during the medieval period and recently (= after 1947) entered a modern situation where the rigidity of the traditional strata is getting relaxed.

The Riang community (1,65,103 in 2001) represent a mature level of cultural complexity. They attained the level of chiefdom. Almost every Riang village had a council, consisting of *Kâch-kâo* (= Chaudhuri), *Yâkcu* (=Minister), *Akcâi* (=Priest), *Khândal* (=Peon) and *Kangreng* (Messenger). The Riang community had an administrative

body at the top level. The following is the list of the names of the officials:

1. *Kâmi Kâchkâo*	Chief
2. *Châpiâ Khân*	Chief Minister
3. *Châpiâ*	Minister
4. *Huklâi Chaudhuri*	Zonal chief
5. *Chheng Krâk*	Chief of army
6. *Akcâi*	Priest
7. *Vaidya*	Physician
8. *Yak Sunga*	Swordsman
9. *Dalai*	Executor of corporal punishment
10. *Dar-Kâlim*	Assistant Priest
11. *Bhândâri*	Store-keeper
12. *Khâng Kâlem*	Collector of contributions
13. *Hâzâri*	Secretary to the Minister
14. *De-Hazari*	Secretary to the Minister
15. *Karma*	Assistant Swordsman
16. *Dhariâ*	Helper to the Chief Priest
17. *Dâoâ*	Messenger
18. *Khândal*	Bodyguard to the Chief
19. *Duguriâ*	Drum beater
20. *Muria*	Flute Player
21. *Su-nai*	Flute Player
22. *Musa-nai*	Dance Master
23. *Rica-nai*	Musician
24. *Bau-nai*	Organiser of feasts
25. *Som-nai*	Cook

The Riang people were once a powerful people. They fought many battles on behalf of the kings of Tripura.

The Jamatia community (74,949 in 2001) represent a mature level of cultural complexity. They attained the level of chiefdom. Almost every Jamatia village had a village council. The Jamatia people were once a powerful people; they fought many battles on behalf of the kings of Tripura; they provided the standing army to the kings of Tripura. The highest authority among the Jamatia

community was called *Hadâ Akrâ*. The post was not hereditary. The qualities of head & heart were the primary considerations. The instrument of his administration was a council.

The Chakma community (64, 293 in 2001) represent a mature level of cultural complexity. They attained the level of chiefdom. Almost every Chakma village had a village council. The Chakma people were once a powerful people; their main concentration was in Rângâmâti of the Hill Tract of Chittagong. The highest authority among the Chakma community was called *Raja*. The instrument of his administration was a council, consisting of such officials as *Dewan* (= Minister), *Tâlukdâr* (= District Administrator), *Khisâ* (Administrator of a *Mouza*), *Kârbâri* (= village chief), etc. The devastating affect of partition has shattered their chiefdom.

The Magh community (30,385 in 2001) represent a mature level of cultural complexity. They attained the level of chiefdom. The Magh people were once a powerful people in the Hill Tract of Chittagong and in Arakan of lower Burma. In 1662 AD. the Magh *Raja* offered hospitality to the fugitive king Govinda Manikya of Tripura. The instrument of the Magh *Raja*'s administration was a council of elders. The foreign attacks and invasions devastated their chiefdom in the CHT. To sum up this note, rural Tripura was largely looked after for centuries by village councils; each council was headed by a *Chaudhuri*. They had no salary, no legal training; no office; but they had intelligence, intimate knowledge, integrity & solvency. They execised administrative, economic, socio-religious & local judicial functions efficiently & economically.

Almost similarly in rural England, the British king Edward I (1272-1307) selected several local gentlemen, designated them Conservator of Peace, & entrusted on them the honorary duty of maintaining peace in the countryside. Edward III (1327-1377) changed the

designation to Justice of Peace.

For an analogy, we may refer to the social strata of three communities of South America : the Olmec, the Maya & the Aztec; they attained a high level of cultural complexity.

4. A note on folk-tale

From time immemorial people have been telling myths, legends, folk-tales, allegories, riddles, proverbs, jokes & folk-songs to one another. These are oral literature. To the childish importunity for telling a story many elders have been submitting spontaneously. The habit of telling stories and of listening to those stories is a sort of craze, eternal and universal.

Some of the ancient folk-tales were recorded long ago. Ancient Indian examples of recorded folk-tales are the *Pancha-tantra*, the *Hitopodesa*, the *Vetâl Pancha-vimsati*, the *Kathâ sarit sâgar*, and the *Jâtaka*.

Ancient Greek example of recorded folk-tales is the *Aesop's Fables*. Ancient European example of recorded folk-tales is the *Beowulf*. Ancient Arabian example of recorded folk-tales is the *Thousand and one nights*.

In Germany the two brothers, Jacob Ludwig Karl Grimm (1785-1863) and Wilhelm Grimm (1786-1859) seriously & systematically studied folk-lore. In 1839 Dr. James Cowles Prichard's (1786-1848) cogent paper on *The extinction of Native Races* effectively stimulated the imagination of the British Association at Birmingham and led to the preparation of a famous questionnaire in 1843, and the foundation of The Ethnological Society in 1843. In Britain in 1846 W. J. Thoms introduced the word 'folk-lore' in English usage.

Then again in Britain a group of folklorists formally founded a folk-lore society in 1878 in London.

The word 'folk-lore' is a broad, generic term; it includes myths, legends, folk-tales, allegories, proverbs, riddles, jokes, ballads,folk-songs, etc.

Myths: Myths are cosmological, supernatural, etiological, & archaic in nature. Traditional explanations regarding

the origin of earth, earthquake, heaven, planets, animals, flora & fauna fall within the category of myth.

Legends: Legends are semi-historical in nature. Traditional account about king, queen, prince, princess, hero, war-lord fall within the category of legends. Any fragment of real history preserved for a long time in legends may be called saga.

Folk-tales: Folk-tales are problematic in nature. Traditional narrations about crisis, calamity, jealousy, horror of incest, unusual marriage, battles, crimes come within folk-tale.

Allegories: Allegories are symbolic in nature. Stories, poems and pictures with a hidden meaning and an indirect suggestion are called allegories. A description of one thing under the image of another is the technique in allegory.

Proverbs: Proverbs are pedantic in nature. Proverbs express maximum thoughts with minimum words. Proverbs cover a wide range of subjects which appeal to the imagination of mature age.

Riddles: Riddles are psychic in nature. Puzzling & deceptive questions may be called riddles. Riddles stimulate thoughts.

Jokes: Jokes are humorous in nature. Humour, jest, sportive remarks are known as jokes.

Ballads: Ballads are poematic in nature. Simple, short, romantic and sentimental poems are usually known as ballads.

Folk-songs: Folk-songs are musical in nature. Traditional, rural, unsophisticated, simple songs of unknown authorship belong to the category of folk-song.

The characteristic features of folk-tales are:

Timeless setting: Folk-tales are works of art, not chronicles of facts. Folk-tales generally begin with such expressions as 'long ago', 'once upon a time', 'in old days', 'formerly', etc. Folk-tales are, says R. H. Crapo, stories

placed in a timeless setting.

Vague location: Folk-tales have no definite place of occurrence. The *locus standi* of folk-tales is uncertain. Folk-tales usually begin with such expressions as 'in a forest', 'in a village', 'in a hamlet', 'in a city', etc. Folk-tales are, says R. H. Crapo, stories of vague location.

Anonymous authorship: It is very difficult to ascertain the authorship of folk-tales. In some remote past and in some remote place, an intelligent person might have started a nucleus of a story; subsequently matters gathered around the central mass.

Theme: Folk-tales quite naturally have a wide range of topics. Accordoing to George Wright (1954) aggression is an important theme of folk-tale. Clyde Kluckahn (1965) identified five major themes: catastrophe, castration, incest, monster-slaying & sibling rivalry. The list may not be complete. In any way, anxiety-related matters figure prominently in the themes of folk-tales. A popular theme is the rescue of a beautiful princess stolen away & stashed elsewhere. Another familiar theme is the Cinderela-type of tragic episode.

Diffusion: Tales were widely disseminated from community to community, hamlet to hamlet. The wide diffusion of some fables & fairy tales may be attributed to migration & movement of people, common talk & hearsay, pilgrimage, trade & transport, war & expedition. Many European folk-tales may be traced to Indian sources. H. G. Rawlinson clearly explained this fact in his scholarly article: *India in European literature & thought.*

Stage setting: Folk-tales are not murky, vague, disjointed, notional ideas. To make a story attractive & vivid, the stage is peopled with actor & actress; and some issues are set before them. Often in an allegory, flora or fauna are the main characters. Substitution of animals and birds for human beings is immaterial.

Size & Structure: Folk-tales widely vary in size & structure. The size varies from a few paragraphs to

several pages. And the structure too varies from simple to complex types. Co-operative interconnections, says R. V. Cassill, is an important feature of a good fiction. Folk-tales too possess this quality.

Purpose: The immediate purpose of the narration of folk-tales is entertainment. Folk-tales are told to entertain the children, to release a tension, to lighten the tediousness of a long journey or of a hard work & to impart a moral lesson. There is thus a clear point of view, a centre of interest.

Animism: The latin word *anima* means life, soul; a belief that even air, cyclone, earth, great rivers & lakes, stone, hill, planets, rain, rainbow, flora & fauna, etc. have life & soul, is called animism. So all these natural objects & flora & fauna and human beings were supposed to be able to talk to each other.

Animism is an essential part & motif of folk-lore. Animistic belief finds no difference in the kind of existence of a man, a dog, a tree or a stone. In an animistic belief, an animal can carry on business like human beings do; and a lion can preside over their chamber of commerce.

Primitive philosophy: The archaic questions & answers regarding certain startling natural phenomena heralded the dawn of crude, primitive philosophy of a bewildering variety.

Background: Folk-tales were not produced in a vaccum. Folk-tales were shaped & coloured by flora & fauna, topography & weather, administrative patterns & life-patterns of a people. Folk-tales embody the thoughts & feelings, worries & anxieties of a people. The freshness and simplicity of the preliterate people are reflected in folk-tales. All primitive minds were not illogical, and all modern minds are not rational.

Point of focus: The preliterate people held in high esteem the members of their royal family, and their village

headmen, & landlords, their priests and the Brahmans. Their life-patterns were the common focus of interest to the villagers. This is why in many ancient Indian folk-tales the main actors were the Brahmans. Europe also had similar trend. The traditional country-tale, comments John Wain, often deals with high-born people, whose lives were a natural foucs of interest to the villagers.

To conclude, the eloquence of a story-teller and the vividness of a story, verisimilitude of an episode are no criteria of scientific truth. Folk-tales are scientifically false, but psycho-socially true.

Do the folk-tales remain archaic in their tone and intonation throughout the centuries? Do they reflect the changing aptitude of the people?

In point of time, certain explanatory tales regarding natural phenomena like thunder, lightning, rainbow, hailstorm, earthquake, eclipse, sunrise, sunset, moon, stars, milkyways; origins of plants, animals, beasts, birds, human beings, etc., told by the ancient elders in response to the questions of the ancient children, seem to be the oldest of all tales. Modern social sciences call them myth and animism. In other words, a belief in the existence of any god or demon or any supernatural personality behind the natural phenomena is called animism. To substantiate, according to the ancient Indian mythology, *Devraj* Indra causes thunder, lightning, etc.

Later came the allegorical tales, and the animistic tales. Here the heroes and the heroines are mostly animals and birds. It is the indirect way of instruction or defamation. The *Hitopodesa*, and the *Aesopic* tales belong to the category of allegorical tales.

Much later came the sophisticated stories and witty tales of modern manufacture. Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910), Guy de Maupassant (1850-1893), and Tagore (1861-1941) and many others contributed to this category of sophisticated tales. Cassill comments that co-operative interconnections of parts and logical sequence of events

are the main features of the modern stories.

Do the folk-tales serve any purpose? What do the myths and folktales stand for? This question has evoked a variety of answers. Interpretations have been offered from various points of view. These interpretations may be called theories of folk-lore. What follows is an attempt at a brief introduction of those theories :

The allegorical theory : Tales are allegories to conceal some deep meaning, to hide some wisdom; to prevent truths or confidential knowledge passing into the hands of impious persons. Francis Bacon's (1561-1626), *De Sapientia veterum* was likey to be an attempt at indicating deep meanings underlying ancient myths.

The symbolic theory: The ancient priests set forth certain truths, principles and formulas through symbols. It is difficult to decode the symbols. So, the symbols were misunderstood subsequently.

The natural phenomenon theory : It is supposed that the gods control the forces of nature. The mechanism of sun and moon, earthquake and cyclone explains the formidable force of the natural phenomena.

The theological theory : In the *Srimad Bhagavatam* there are several didatic stories. The *Jataka* contains a number of tales about the previous life of the *Buddha* (563-483). The *Bible* is supposed by some people to be an ancient source of myths.

The hero theory: The hero worship is a common human tendency. The names of certain mythical figures or personalities were invented to add dignity to ancestry after attaining power; an ordinary person invents a long geneology claiming higher and better origin.

The rationalistic theory: All myths are perversions of real history. Most of mythical stories are the result of delusion, hallucination and misunderstanding. The story of a monster half-horse and half-man is an example of perversion. In India the story of a prince riding on a *Pakshiraj Ghora* may be another example.

The Philological theory : Mythology springs from imaginative treatment of physical forces. Primitive man was preliterate and imaginative. He expressed his awe through myths. In course of time, the original meaning of words was corrupted into something else.

The anthropological theory : The origins of myths can be traced back among primitive men. The archaic primitive form was subsequently developed into literary form.

5. A note on rational interpretation of myth

Myths may mesmerise the minds of millions of people. Myths and legends may be different in different countries and in different groups of people. Myths may not be taken as historical evidence. In myth an animal half-horse and half-bird may exist; a prince may come riding on that animal to rescue a princess. A woman may be turned into a stone. To remove a veil from a myth is the task of research. A few examples of this sort of mysterious myth may be briefly noted here. Myths disillusionise a researcher.

1. In ancient Bharat *Rishi* Gautam and his wife Ahalya were living in an *asram* in a sylvan environment. One day Gautam went to a river to bathe. During his absence, Indra came and molested Ahalya. On returning home, Gautam cursed both; Ahalya was turned into a stone. After several centuries, during the *Treta Yoga*, Rama touched the stone by his foot, and immediately Ahalya stood up in all her beauty and youth.

This mythical story is to be found in the Valmiki *Ramayana* and in the *Katha-Sarit-Sagara*. To this mythical legend, a rational interpretation can be added thus :

During the absence of Gautam, a gang of local debauchees lasciviously raped Ahalya. The notorious libertines quickly decamped. Ahalya was left helpless. On reaching home, Gautam saw the utter helplessness of Ahalya; she became dejected, depressed, dispirited, heavyhearted & sad. Her life became forlorn and wretched.

Rama treated her with compassion and

understanding. Rama salvaged her to her dignity. Rama was the contemporary saviour. On the contrary, the mood of the hermitage of *Rishi* Atri & Anusuya at Chitrakut was quite cordial, hospitable, welcoming and sociable.

2. Another example : the myth of Unakoti Hills of Tripura

Long, long ago a team of gods journeyed for several days; they halted at several *asrams* in the guise of pilgrims. At last they reached a pleasant hilly place in Tripura. The hungry gods halted there. They were to awake and leave the place before dawn. But the exhausted gods fell asleep. The sun rose in time. So the gods were turned into stones.

This is another example of sheer incredible myth. One rational interpretation of this simple myth may be like this :

The rising Tripuri dynasty had its capital in and around Kailasha-har at the foothills of the Unakoti Hills. The Tripuri dynasty had a mission & vision for nation-building activities. For making a holy shrine, the Tripuri dynasty engaged some sculptors and provided all necessary support for the preparation of rock-cut images of Hindu gods. According to another scholar, it is a contribution of the local Saivites. According to Dr. S.R. Das (1916-1996), it is a work of 8th century A.D.

3. H.J Rose has furnished a similar myth from Greek mythology. Thessaly was, long ago, much plagued by herds of wild cattle. The king declared to give rewards for a remedy. A group of courageous archers, riding on horseback, rapidly shot down many of the beasts. The archers came from a very distant place and accomplished the job at night and retired without ado. From this episode arose a myth : the saviours were a mixture of man and horse; (Rose : *A Handbook of Greek Mythology*; pp. 4-5)

6. A Glossary of terms

Achâi	=	Priest
Akchâi	=	Priest
Ârâk	=	Wine
Binâigar	=	God
Binandiâ	=	Police
Bâra ghariâ	=	Tripuri aristocrats
Barak	=	Man
Biju nritta	=	A Chakma group dance
Châmâri	=	Bridegroom
Chantâi	=	Chief Priest
Chatra tuiya	=	Umbrella bearer
Chaudda Devata	=	14 Deities
Chaudhuri	=	Village chief
Chiklâ	=	youngman, bachelor
Chikli	=	young woman, spinster
Chiklâ Michip Nok	=	Bachelors' dormitory
Chuâk	=	Wine
Chungâ	=	Bamboo pipe
Dâo	=	Long knife
Dhamail nritta	=	A Bengali group dance
Gajan nritta	=	A Bengali group dance
Gâlim	=	Sacrificer
Garia nritta	=	A Tripuri group dance
Gâtighar	=	Store house
Garh	=	Fort
Gariâ	=	God
Godak	=	Uncooked curry of vegetables
Hâ	=	Land
Hâ bubagrâ	=	Land lord
Hadâ Akrâ	=	Chief of Jamatia Community
Hojagiri nritta	=	A Tripuri group dance
Huk	=	Shifting cultivation
Jum	=	Shifting cultivation
Jolai	=	Servant
Jum nritta	=	A Tripuri group dance
Kabrâ	=	Land lord

Kak	=	Language
Kaiching	=	Tortoise
Kami	=	Village
Kârbâri	=	Village council official
Karta	=	Descendant of the royal family
Kâtâl	=	Pure
Khul	=	Cotton
Ker puja	=	Worship for kingdom's welfare
Kereng Kathmâ	=	Folk-tale
Khândal	=	Peon
Khârchi	=	Annual worship of the 14 deities
Kirât	=	Hunters
Lâl	=	Lushai chief
Lâmprâ Puja	=	Worship for social welfare
Mahârâjâ	=	Emperor
Maiung Kuphurni Kereng Kathma	=	The story of white elephant
Mantri	=	Minister
Matâi	=	God
Matâi Katar	=	Supreme god
Matâi Katarmâ	=	Supreme god's wife
Michip	=	Leader
Muichele	=	Python
Naksu	=	Corner of a house
Nara bali	=	Human sacrifice
Ojhâi	=	Shaman
Phâidi	=	Come
Phalâ	=	Soul
Phâ	=	Father
Rândâ	=	Widower
Râṅdi	=	Widow
Risâ	=	Clothe
Rignâi	=	Clothes
Sâl	=	Sun
Sati dah	=	Burning of a widow
Sikâl	=	Wizard

Tâl	=	Moon
Thâkur	=	Tripuri aristocrat
Tui	=	Water
Tripura Sundri	=	The Goddess of Tripura
Zawlbuk	=	Bachelors' dormitory
Zu	=	Wine

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Unokoti, Kailashahar

Archeological Site-Pilak, South Tripura

Tongh - Traditional Tribal Hut

Hazagiri Dance

Juhm Cultivation by Tribal People

Collection of fire woods by Tribal Women

Tripureswari Temple, Udaipur

Chaturdash Devata Temple, Old Agartala

Born and brought up in Tripura and educated in Tripura and in Calcutta, Jagadis Gan-Chaudhuri was reader and head of the department of Political Science, Bir Bikram Memorial College, Agartala, Tripura. He has written & edited several books about the history and culture of the people of Tripura.

Attacks & invasions and depredations by wild animals were the two major preoccupations of the people of Tripura during the medieval period. The history of this period was packed up with numerous episodes. Indirectly, those episodes gave rise to various kinds of folktales.

Several collectors have dealt with those folktales. But, the uniqueness of Dr. Jagadis Gan-Chaudhuri's treatment of the folktales lies in highlighting the background of the genesis of the folktales, a comparative analysis between the two major groups of folktales, a rational interpretation of some myths, and a study of the motif.

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